

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY 1980

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DIAMONDS ARE DEADLY

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

ALL NEW STORIES!
NEW FEATURES!

DEATH ON THE STRIP
by GARY BRANDNER

THE LAST PASSENGER
by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.

JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS
by EDWARD D. HOCH



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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

BY BRETT HALLIDAY

The Kordil Brothers were in the diamond business — and a deadly business it was. A killer was in their midst who seemed intent upon murdering them all — and Mike Shayne as well! 5

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Over the years MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE has been the showcase for well-known names in the field and also for people just starting out on writing careers. Many "first" stories have graced our pages in the past and hopefully many others will appear here in the future.

As for the present issue, we have included in our lineup for this month, *The Principal Of The Thing*, a charming little story by SUSAN ZSAFRANSKI.

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.'s contribution to our magazine is certainly not his first published work, though it is his first MSMM appearance. Here's a partial entry from *The Encyclopedia of Crime and Detection*:

NEVINS, FRANCIS M., JR. (1943—). American lawyer, editor, critic, and author. Born in Bayonne, N.J., Nevins graduated from the Law School of New York University and was admitted to New Jersey bar in 1967. After Army service in Oklahoma and work as a poverty lawyer, he began teaching at St. Louis University Law School, where he is now a full professor.

Interested in the mystery since he was thirteen, Nevins has written many book reviews and articles and edited two books. *The Mystery Writer's Art* (1970) is an anthology of essays written between 1949 and 1979 and dealing with such subjects as the mystery film, the work of various writers, and historical trends in the genre. *Nightwebs* (1971) is a collection of fifteen stories by Cornell WOOLRICH that had never previously been reprinted.

Nevins is the author of *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective* (1974), a book about the lives and works of Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, for which he won an Edgar.

His first novel about amateur detective, law school professor Loren Mensing, *Publish and Perish*, appeared in the fall of 1975. A second, *Corrupt and Ensnare*, was published in 1978. One of his stories appeared in the 1979 volume of *Best Detective Stories of the Year*.

(continued on Page 107)

DIAMONDS ARE DEADLY



by Brett Halliday

Somebody Was Killing the Kordil Brothers, and the Big Detective Had to Find the Killer — Before He Became One of the Victims!

WHEN MIKE SHAYNE got back from lunch that day, he was treated to a sight he'd never seen in all his years as a Miami private detective. As he walked down the hall, the door to his office opened and Lucy Hamilton staggered out. Lucy was Shayne's secretary, friend, sometimes lover and the most important person in his life.

There was a fleck of blood at the lips of the brown-haired woman. She held her middle and leaned against the door jamb, gasping.

Shayne was at her side in a second.

"Lucy — for God's sake!"

"A man!" she gasped. "Steve Something — somebody you put in jail long ago. He — "

Shayne caught Lucy and led her back into the office gently.

"What did he do? Where are you hurt?"

"Not seriously, Michael. Ah, ah. He slapped my face ... hit me once ... stomach ... threatened to kill you ... out of prison ... get revenge."

Shayne cursed but forced himself to keep control. For anyone to attack Lucy was as bad as if they attacked him. Perhaps it made him angrier. In his business he was used to threats, rough treatment and even physical combat. Assaulting his secretary was beyond the pale. Controlled rage possessed him.

"What did this Steve look like?"

"Young, dark-haired. Think I remember him, Michael. He said he'd kill you ... throw acid in my face. Burn off my face. A — a real psychotic."

Shayne's expert eye saw that Lucy was not badly hurt. It was a case of a young punk throwing his weight, bully-fashion, against a helpless woman. The fleck of blood was from the slap, probably a small cut on her lip. The punk had hit her in the middle which winded her, called out his acid threat and fled.

"You be all right for a few minutes?"

"Yes, yes, fine, Michael. Nothing serious."

She relaxed at her desk. She had her breath back now, and her brown eyes flashed.

"Steve Crenshaw or something like that. I can look it up in the files and — yes, it was just him alone. But I'll look him up."

Shayne was already at the door.

"Do that, Lucy. I'm on my way."

He spun out of the office and went for the stairs. Too much adrenalin pumped inside of him for him to wait for elevators. When he reached the garage level two men in a car were just disappearing out of the ramp. He raced for his Buick.

It wouldn't be the first time that some criminal Shayne had helped

catch and convict had threatened revenge. It was rare, however, for the convict to come back after his term and try something. Why should he jeopardize his newly attained freedom when his time was served? Also, many did not want to return to the locale of a traumatic defeat, unless they had family, and that was another restraint.

Shayne knew, however, that in his long career he was bound to meet a few sullen, brooding types who kept their hatred alive and came back to make trouble. This one might be psychotic. He'd come to Shayne's office without plan or finesse to burn out a maniacal hatred. When he found Shayne gone, he flipped and struck out blindly at Lucy, sitting in the outer office.

Well, Shayne could deal with him if he could get his hands on the man! The blows against Lucy were bad enough. The acid threat really bothered Shayne, even if it were an idle inspiration.

The car up ahead swung into the one o'clock traffic. It was a rental car, according to the legend in the frame around the license plate. If Steve Whatever were just out of prison he wouldn't have a driver's license, which accounted for the second man, who drove the car. Shayne could see that the passenger was a youngish, dark-haired man, so that was enough to make his follow justified.

"I'm gonna get you, Shayne. Just you wait. I'm coming for you —"

The words flashed through Shayne's mind as he drove. There'd been a note like that with a big scrawled "S" at the bottom, in the mail a couple of weeks before. Shayne's mail was exotic enough so that he paid no attention to the angry scrawl.

The car with the two men picked up one of the causeways cutting over the Bay into Miami Beach, while Shayne followed, not particularly disguising his intent. If the car speeded up, he was ready for that game — and it would confirm that they had a reason to shake him. If it stopped and the dark-haired man got out to challenge him, so much the better. Shayne's adrenalin level was just right.

The car moved to the retail district of Miami Beach; then it turned down a side street and parked. The street was one of professional office buildings, doctors, lawyers, a clinic — small but expensive looking structures on either side. There were stretches of lawn, shrubs and flowers — a parklike, pleasant and quiet area on the whole.

Shayne parked behind the rental vehicle, took his gun from the glove compartment of the Buick, and walked to the passenger side of the car. The young man who glared up at him was dark-haired,

beefy and had a hooded, resenting look on his face.

"Hello, Steve," said Shayne.

Steve glared at him for a moment in impersonal hostility, then his eyes widened:

"Mike Shayne!"

He was out of the car and coming at Shayne in a gut reaction surge of power and muscle. He was big, he was strong, he looked mean. He was also unarmed. He swung at Shayne. The redheaded Miami private detective was also big and strong and, right now, mean. He ducked and gave it to Steve in the stomach.

"Unnnnk!"

The air rushed out of the attacker's lungs. Shayne followed his first blow with a hard slap to the head that dazed his man. Just like this meathead had given to Lucy — one in the stomach, a slap on the face. And one more to put the debt on the other side. Shayne kneed his opponent viciously. When it came to anyone who struck his angel, Lucy, he'd show no mercy.

That did it for Steve. He fell forward on the grass. Big as he was, Shayne shouldered him up and flung him face forward over the fender of the car.

Even during the brief action, Shayne's memory went to work and pulled out the name of the man, now that he saw him face to face. Steve Crandall, jewel thief, four years ago in Miami.

Shayne shot a brief glance at the

other man in the car who had not moved. The driver sat there impassively watching it all as if he were a spectator at a sporting event.

Shayne brought his face close to the agonized face of his victim.

"Okay, Steve Crandall. What you got so far is for what you did to my secretary."

"You nearly killed me!" gasped the white-faced man.

"I don't want her touched, Steve Crandall. I don't even want you to look at her cross-eyed, ever again. I also don't want you threatening me or jumping me in any way, shape or form."

Shayne pulled his revolver from his belt, shoved the barrel into the soft skin just under the jawbone. He cocked the hammer, a freezing sound to a man with a gun at his head.

" — because, Steve Crandall, I'd just looove to have a reason to pull this trigger. Do you get my message?"

The gasping ex-jewel-thief nodded. Shayne thought again about the threat to throw acid at Lucy. He grabbed a handful of dirty hair and slammed the man's face on the hood of the car for emphasis and then backed off. Steve slid to the ground, dazed, bleeding.

Shayne bent down to look at the other man in the car. He had even wider shoulders than Steve, but he did not have a look of muscle about him. There was intelligence in

those gray eyes — and those eyes were cold, contained, hiding menace.

"You pick the wrong buddies, friend."

"I told the kid not to do it," said the man. "You followed and cut him up. That's it, huh?"

Shayne grunted. The driver showed not the slightest sympathy towards the punk, now animosity towards Shayne for what he'd done.

"I hope that's it," said Shayne. "If he touches my secretary again, or comes at me, there'll be real blood. It could spatter on anybody who drives him around."

The man shrugged. "I'll tell him when he comes back from birdland."

"If his parole officer finds out — " Shayne started.

"This cowboy didn't get parole," said the man. "He did his time hard, right to the end. Loses his temper easily."

Shayne slammed the door of the car, then looked at Steve. The kid's eyes were closed and he looked white and drawn. He was too concerned with his inner agony to know that Shayne was still there.

II

SHAYNE GOT BACK in his car and drove off, scanning the building signs as he often did at any location. Knowing exactly where you were sometimes be-

came vital to a private detective. He stopped on the next street, used his car telephone to call Lucy. She had recovered and listened with delight to Shayne's report on his followup.

"You did it just right, Michael. Thanks."

Then she gave him the man's name from the office files. One Steven Crandall, jewel-thief, involved in ... and so on and so on. It was a long-ago case. Shayne couldn't believe it mattered now, but still sat in his car, pondering. Crandall and his driver friend had chosen to park between two buildings. On one side of the street there'd been a discreet sign:

Max Kordil — Gem cutter.

The building on the other side bore the single word sign in larger letters: KORDIL'S. Shayne knew that Kordil brothers were one of Miami Beach's largest diamond merchants, retail. Their place was not exactly a store, not was it a private establishment, either. It was a discreet diamond salon for the very wealthy.

Diamond merchants. Jewel-thief.

Shayne grunted, got out of his car, and walked around the block. The rental car was still there. The driver still sat behind the wheel. As Shayne came up the street he caught a flash of the hells of Steve Crandall just disappearing into the small building with the "Kordil's" sign.

He didn't think the two hoods would be dumb enough to try anything like a robbery when they'd just had a dust-up with a private detective outside the place they intended to rob, but he was curious. The Kordils might appreciate knowing that a jewel-thief, just returned from prison, had entered their establishment.

Being careful that the driver didn't see him, Shayne moved to the place that was even smaller, the office of Max Kordil, the gem-cutter. It was obvious that there was a relationship ...

Kerry Kordil said to her father, in a worried voice:

"Daddy, a man just came into our building with a gun stuck in his belt."

Max Kordil, who worked at his bench, said absently:

"Tell him we don't want any."

"Daddy! She looked at the closed circuit TV picture again, as the buzzer rang. "He doesn't look evil. Red-headed, with a strong face, but he has a gun in his belt."

The pudgy gem cutter raised mild blue eyes to stare at his daughter.

"So let him in, child. A thief wouldn't march up with a gun showing."

Shayne identified himself and Kerry Kordil let him in. She seemed impressed with his looks. He delivered his message to the gem cutter and the girl, studying them and the room.

The old man was overweight, with a round face, mild blue eyes and a continual expression of surprise. The girl was a Florida blonde with all of the right things in the right places. She seemed overdressed in this simple office. It had a couple of workbenches, jigs, saws and devices that Shayne couldn't identify. The jeweler's eye glass, however, gave meaning to the whole. The lighting in the room was superb, from big windows, overhead lights and desk lamps.

"Most kind of you, Mr. Shayne," said Max when the detective finished. He went to the big, barred windows and looked out at the car with the driver still seated there. "Steve Crandall, you say?"

"Yes." Shayne described the jewel thief.

The gem cutter sighed and returned to his bench. "There'd be no use to call. The young man you identify as Steve Crandall is actually Steve Kordil, my youngest brother. There are six of us, Mr. Shayne. Steve's the one who went bad."

"Daddy," said Kerry, "since Mr. Shayne is here shouldn't we — you — tell him —"

"NO!" The blue eyes flashed. The look of surprise turned to one of dismay. "What happens across the street is no longer my business. I cut stones, that's all. For my brothers and for others, too. They'll deal with Steve, who

probably wants money. I expect he'll come to me, too. I haven't decided how to handle that."

"I'd be careful, Mr. Kordil. He seems unstable. I've had some personal trouble with him."

"Daddy, I definitely think we should talk to Mr. Shayne about — what we've been talking about. After all, he's a private detective."

Max shook his head, put a hand on Shayne's arm to escort him gently but firmly to the door.

"No, no. It's fantasy. Idle talk. Thank you for your trouble, Mr. Shayne — and good day."

Shayne looked at the girl, shrugged and went out the door. He certainly didn't need any new clients, especially five brothers in the jewelry business who had a jewel thief for a brother.

Kerry Kordil followed him to the curb. Glancing up, Shayne could see the old gem cutter standing at the window glaring down. The man in the car also watched Shayne and the girl.

"I want to hire you, Mr. Shayne."

"What's it all about, Miss Kordil?"

Her blue eyes flashed and there was a blush on her cheeks. It was obvious that there'd been an exchange between father and daughter and she'd disagreed with him.

"Call me 'Kerry' ... It's about my uncles across the street. We

think — at least I think — they're selling jewelry, especially diamonds, to be stolen and sold again."

"I don't understand."

She told him that her father, as a cutter, not only prepared raw stones as they came in from the Amsterdam diamond exchange for their first sale, but he recut gems that had already served one purpose and might be wanted for another.

"A diamond brooch, Mr. Shayne, might become two rings. A carat stone could become a two-thirds carat ring and a one-third carat ring. With inflation lots of money goes into fine jewelry, so the two rings might sell for more than the single brooch, since rings are more popular."

She told him other cuts could be made. Rings or bracelet settings could become earrings or slim watch settings. Her father did lots of this kind of work.

"Maybe my uncles — Roger heads the family business — might sell big stones, tip off thieves who steal them, get them back and recut them to sell as smaller pieces."

"Kerry, information like that should go to the police."

"I'd never turn in my family!" she flashed. "But I have pictures to compare — "

Shayne went around to get in his car.

"It won't do, Kerry. Private

detectives can't subvert the law. At least I won't. If it's open and shut, try the police first."

"Damn you!" she blazed.

He drove off, glad that she was angry, not distressed. Like any other male Shayne hated to reject decent people up to and including pretty young blondes. But he'd settled the score with Steve Kordil and had no desire to mix any further with the rest of the Kordil family.

III

BACK AT HIS OFFICE, Shayne found Lucy in good shape, although still shaken from Steve Kordil's roughhouse attack, so he sent her home early. She'd laid out the old file on "Steve Crandall" but he didn't want to touch it right now.

His mind was on other things by the time he closed his office and went into the basement garage of his building to get his car. Kerry Kordil stood by his car waiting for him. She looked trim and dainty, sparkling against the grey grime of the garage. She held a large manila envelope in her hand. He remembered she'd spoken about some pictures. Her overdressed elegance had given way to a soft pink slack suit that did lots for her figure. *Persistent*, thought Shayne as he started toward her.

Something was wrong. He no sooner sensed it than a man

rushed out from one of the pillars towards the girl. It was the driver, the coldeyed man who chauffeured Steve Kordil around. He was much closer to the girl than Shayne.

"Kerry! Look out!" shouted Shayne as he broke into his long-legged gait.

The girl half turned, but the man was already upon her. He didn't touch her. He snatched the manila envelope from her hand and shot off along the cement at amazing speed.

Shayne spun to follow the man, shifting into high gear. Cars swerved around him as he ran; it was the five-o'clock going-home time. The driver was a strong runner, but so was Shayne. He knew he could catch the man.

The man reached the ramp. Shayne gave a glance backward — what he saw made him skid to a stop and change direction. A small car had pulled up by his car. A burly man jumped out and seized Kerry. He wrestled her into the small car, while she kicked her legs and shouted.

Shayne raced to stop Kerry's abduction, even as he noted that the kidnapper was her uncle — Steve Kordil!

He reached his car by the time the smaller car skidded away towards the out ramp. The distance was too great; his luck was out. By the time he started the Buick and gave chase, the small car had melted into traffic, nor was there any sign of the driver.

Shayne grunted, rubbed his left ear lobe between his thumb and forefinger. He swung the Buick around, parked again and returned to his office.

He reached Max Kordil on the third number he tried. He told the girl's father what had happened.

"I don't know what's going on with your family, Kordil," Shayne finished. "Kerry wanted to hire me; I turned her down. But now I'm interested. You can talk to me — or you can talk to the police."

Max stuttered and stammered that it was really nothing but personal family troubles.

"My daughter's excitable, Mr. Shayne. She imagines things. We're Polish, a close-knit, highly-emotional family. I merely asked Steve to follow her and reason with her. There's nothing wrong. You see, our business is so sensitive. The slightest rumor — "

"Me or the police, Kordil."

"Of course you should talk to her!" Max Kordil almost shouted in his desperation. "Talk to her for a hundred hours. Look at her pictures. I really insist upon it."

"Where is she?"

"She is at my brother Roger's house. I have already heard from her. You can see her tonight. The Kordils have a bowling team. No matter we have our differences, we always bowl. We bowl as a team, the Kordil brothers. We have won many trophies. Once a week we do this. Steve will be there, I will be there, Kerry will

be there. Pictures will be there. I insist that you come and speak to my daughter and see all her pictures."

He gave Shayne the name of the bowling alley and the time.

Shayne called his friend, Tim Rourke, of the Miami Daily News and they got together at one of Shayne's favorite restaurants, the GOLDEN COCK on Biscayne Blvd. where they mangled a juicy steak and finished off with a Hennessey's provided by Shayne's favorite bartender, Bill.

Tim, scarecrow thin and with a suit as wrinkled as his face, still had an intellect and a memory as pure as diamonds. He told Shayne that the Kordils were well-known and reputable.

"There has been talk of the firm breaking up," said Tim. "It was run in an authoritative manner by the father of the brothers, but he's gone. Also, one of the brothers got in trouble a while back."

"I know about that," said Shayne grimly. "What about this fellow I've described to you?"

"Could be Henry Daminski, an ex-jewel thief from New York. He's retired and been in no trouble in Miami. We could check it in the *News* morgue."

"We'll do that," said Shayne. "Then you and I are going bowling."

The BISCAYNE ROLL was a typical bowling alley, located on the edge of downtown Miami. By

the time the Kordil Brothers arrived, Tim and Shayne had rolled two games and each won one.

The Kordils were all blond and looked alike. Only Max was fat, the rest were big, blond, quiet. Maybe too quiet, thought Shayne as he and Tim were introduced around. They might have good reason to be; Tim and he had positively identified Henry Daminski, ex-New York jewel thief as the man Shayne called the driver, at the *News*.

They met Roger, white-haired, the oldest, and Herb with gold-rimmed glasses, and Arnold and Frank.

It was league night, and Steve arrived with Kerry just as the Kordils started their match with their opponent of the night. Steve glowered at Shayne but went at once to join his brothers. Kerry, Shayne and Tim retreated to the booths above the bowling floor to talk.

"I can see you're finally interested in my case, Mr. Shayne," said Kerry with a triumphant light in her blue eyes.

"Of course he's interested," said Tim, drinking in the young girl's charms. He was partial to blondes — except when he met good-looking brunettes or red-heads.

"I'm interested," Shayne conceded with a smile for Tim's enthusiasm.

"I was right!" she said trium-

phantly. "But the stolen jewels were not the Kordils' fault — it was an accident. But I spotted it! Think of it — all those so-called experts and I spotted it. And I'm only a fashion model."

"And a damn good one, I'll bet," said Tim enthusiastically.

"Is that why your uncle Steve kidnapped you in my garage — to explain it was all an accident?"

"I bit him!" said Kerry. "I really did. I bit him twice!"

"Mike, if you're through talking, maybe Kerry'd like to bowl," said Tim.

There was a burst of hilarity down on the floor. One of the Kordils had thrown a split and the jeering was long and vocal. Shayne watched the girl's eyes as she looked down on the scene. There was fear in them and even a touch of horror. She gave a slight shudder. Then she looked back at Shayne and for a second he read the message *Help me!* But she said brightly to Tim:

"Sure, I'd like to bowl."

Shayne left them and headed out into the night. There had to be one more round because Steve Kordil annoyed him and the girl was very frightened. By midnight he had the story on Henry Daminski and went back to the bowling alley. He was too late; there was only a single car and a janitor's truck.

Suddenly the doors burst open and a man ran out, a Cuban, obviously the janitor that belonged

to the pickup truck.

"Senor, Senor — man dead in there! DEAD MAN!"

Shayne bounded past the janitor into the building. What he saw was one of the spookier sights of his career.

Directly under the checkout desk, clearly outlined in the overhead night-light a man lay on his side. The hilt of a large knife protruded from his back. He did not breathe, and Shayne could see the irregular shape of darkening blood under him.

There was a crumpled score sheet under his hand, a litter of paper matches and a matchbook folder. The dead hand curled; the man had seemed to be trying to write on the blank score sheet. There was no pen or pencil.

The sight was especially gruesome because a bowling alley was a place of pleasure, not a site where one expected to find death. As Shayne gently touched the corpse he saw that no medical aid would help; the man was gone. Yet the blood was still bright, hardly dried. The killing had been very recent.

Shayne fixed the picture in his mind, the dark brown polish of the rear of the bowling lane, the score sheet, the litter of matches, the match book folder and the corpse itself dressed in leisure clothes, with the knife in his back and a look of eternal surprise on his face. It was a man who'd been fat in life ...

The dead man was Max Kordil, the gem-cutter ...

IV

AN HOUR LATER the police had changed the lonely macabre scene into one of bustle and babble as the various homicide units worked. Dawson, the homicide detective in charge, took Shayne's statement and then speculated with him about the message the dying man had tried to leave. It was not uncommon for Shayne to be so accepted by the Miami Police. They knew him well from his long career, and he was a close personal friend of their chief, Will Gentry.

"The old boy tried to tell us who did it, all right," said Dawson. "His wound was fatal. He was fading fast. He thought he had time to finger his killer, leave a message behind. But he had no paper or pencil."

"So he crawled to the little score desk, reached up and managed to tear off a single score sheet from the pad someone left there," Shayne supplied. "He had no pencil or pen, so he burned the matches from the match book folder and tried to write with the ash."

"Right. He was a pipe-smoker. We found one in his jacket."

The trouble was, the message was unreadable, just scratches on the paper. The matchbook folder was almost empty with only three

matches left in it, one on the left, two- on the right. His pencil substitute hadn't worked.

Three matches. Something stirred in Shayne's mind but he couldn't bring it to the surface.

There was no use speculating further. Shayne left the bowling alley. Poor Kerry! His heart went out to her. Her father was dead on the same day that Steve Kordil returned from prison, on the same day she tried to hire a private detective because of trouble in the Kordil firm.

As for Max, he'd stupidly tried to head off an investigation that could've saved his life if he'd gone public soon enough. Family pride was his downfall. Was it possible that Steve had been invited, egged into a battle with his older brother, with one or all of them counting on Steve's bursts of senseless violence to quiet the fat gem cutter?

It looked like Chief Will Gentry had a savage murder case on his hands ...

The murder of the gem cutter made a big splash on TV and in the papers. To be sure, there was more glamor than mystery. It seemed to be the work of the ex-convict, Steven Kordil, the youngest of the brothers. They testified he'd come back from prison to demand money from them. Being refused, he'd taken revenge on a target of opportunity, Max, who had unfortunately lingered behind in the bowling alley. He was now a fugitive considered extremely

dangerous. Also being sought was one Henry Daminski, his former jewel thief and companion.

On the day after Max Kordil's funeral, Shayne sat in his office aware that he was about to take on a case that he did not want for a client he'd rather not have but could not escape. The look of fear and helplessness in the eyes of Kerry Kordil at the bowling alley that night haunted him. By merely being the father's daughter and spotting irregular transactions she was into trouble deeper than she could ever manage.

He's just received a call from her.

"Mr. Shayne, I have a modeling call today that I have to take — or else stare at the walls and go mad. Can I see you tonight?"

"Yes, Kerry," he said kindly.

A uniformed chauffeur walked into his office. Since Lucy was still out to lunch, there was nobody in the outer office to waylay him. He saluted smartly and said:

"Mr. Herbert Kordil waits for you downstairs in his Rolls. He has a dangerous mission for you. He will pay you well. You are supposed to bring your gun."

Shayne had had many an odd customer enter his office, but this abrupt call for his services ranked high.

"Do you suppose it's a good afternoon for a dangerous mission?" Shayne asked the uniformed man.

"I wouldn't know, sir,"

answered the chauffeur, carefully preserving his impersonality.

Amused and intrigued, Shayne decided to avoid protocol and not make Herb Kordil soil himself with a pedestrian ascent to his office.

Mr. Herbert Kordil wore gold-rimmed glasses and looked like a Hollywood stereotype of a college professor, perhaps even a dean. He had Max Kordil's round features but was thin, with pale blue eyes. His dress was impeccable as was the Rolls which whispered silently down the street, windows up, a one-room mobile palace.

"I am bringing you to Steve Kordil, my dear Shayne," Herb Kordil said in a high voice that was animated and didactic. "I would guess that would appeal to you."

"With my gun?"

"A necessary precaution, I would think. The police want him. Everyone will feel safer if he's off the streets. I regret doing this to my own brother, but one steals oneself."

"We could stop the car and call the police."

"My dear Shayne, everyone knows about S.W.A.T. squads, and crowds of men with automatic weapons and TV cameras. It is not the sort of publicity the Kordils need. Or can stand right now. I know you appreciate that."

Kordil went on to say that they were headed for Max and Kerry's

small cottage near the university. Kerry was out for the day on a modeling assignment. Unknown to her, Steve Kordil was in her basement, digging it up.

"Why would he do that?"

"Because he believes that Max left a large sum of money behind. Which he probably did. Max has not been upright."

"Who told you about Steve digging for this money?"

"We received a telephone call from a reliable informant."

"Daminski — "

"Mr. Daminski has served the Kordils in a quite minor capacity. As an informant about the underworld. These days normal security is not enough for a large jewelry firm such as ours. For a small sum we're able to breathe easier. It has been misunderstood."

Shayne curled his lip and told Herb that Daminski was far from retired. His information was that the man recruited young jewel thieves and sent them north to New York on special robbery assignments.

Kordil merely nodded.

"It now appears, shocking though it is, that our dear brother, Max, teamed up with the man behind our backs in some sort of despicable racket. We are no longer his employer. But the immediate problem is to put poor Steve in safe hands, don't you agree."

"I agree."

Shayne felt his gun in the shoulder holster. Whatever Herb Kordil's game, a chance to run down Steve was worth it. Herb now reached in his pocket and produced a soft bit of felt. Upon it he placed, from another pocket, a diamond that glittered like fire in the afternoon sun.

"This is to be your payment, my dear Shayne. It is a yellow, not a blue or a white, and yet it is superb. It is worth ten thousand dollars. In these days of inflation we thought you might appreciate this sort of payment more than cash or a check."

"You *really* don't want publicity," said Shayne.

Herb handed over the gem in its cloth.

"You cannot imagine our distress at the advent of Steve, nor overstate our desire to place him quietly in the hands of the police."

That or a shoot-out, thought Shayne. It was that kind of payment. It still made sense. Steve was just as much a threat to him as to the Kordils, so he would play Kordil's game.

The car paused at a street corner to allow a pretty young lady to cross. The men in the back and the chauffeur up front stared idly but with appreciation at the beauty. She seemed to unlock Herb Kordil's ruminations.

"Ahh, a delightful creature, Mr. Shayne. I do appreciate beauty. It all comes down to love in the end, and the lack of it. Once

the Kordils had it, now not so much.

"Our father emigrated from Poland. We were Kordilewskis then. A close Catholic family, unwilling to stay in a communist country after World War II. Our father settled in Amsterdam where he brought us up in the diamond trade. Then it was New York and finally Miami. Since his death there've been divergences and differences of opinion. Max pulling out. Arnold and Frank wanting to open a store in the Omni. An ordinary, wristwatch jewelry store, imagine! And Steve, of course. The poor soul had too many older brothers to compete with. So here we ride to bring him a tragic confinement, more trouble. Times are not as simple as in my father's day."

"Well, you still have your bowling team," said Shayne.

"Even that, not what it once was," said Herb a gleam of humor in his eye. "Can you imagine our best bowler, Roger, throwing a split the other night? Incredible!"

They had entered the University district and drive down streets of small houses.

"Max's cottage is just ahead," said Kordil. "I abhor violence, so you will understand if I do not go with you. He's a widower and lives alone with dear Kerry, poor child. Max was the lively one. She's a little pompous, I fear. She has flashes of temper, but on the whole a successful girl, beautiful.

Do you mind if I park here?"

"I didn't expect you to pull up in front," grunted Shayne.

Herb Kordil rapped on the glass; the chauffeur stopped.

"The best of luck; my dear Shayne," said Kordil. "I envy you your courage and spirit. It must be a satisfying profession."

"Days like these," said Shayne, "stick in the mind."

He waved and headed towards the house indicated. The address was right, so it was truly Max Kordil's house. He was aware this could be a set-up, but some of his best successes came from walking into danger. There was no doubt that Steve Kordil, now a fugitive, would be quick on the trigger.

Shayne closed his mind to speculation and moved smoothly towards Kerry's house, mind alert, reflexes loose. With luck nobody would get hurt. Without luck ...

V

THE HOUSE WAS SMALL, on a large lot, with a profusion of flowers and shrubs around it, a couple of palms in the front. It was a friendly, warm little house such as might belong to a professor at the nearby University. Shayne decided it was the most modest of the homes all of the brothers lived in. Max Kordil, in splitting off from the brothers, had not done nearly as well — which lent some credence to Herb Kordil's story

that Max had initiated the larceny scheme with Daminski. It was possible but not probable, just as the diamond in the felt in Shayne's pocket might be worth ten thousand dollars but was probably worth much less.

The house had no cellar unless there was a hurricane shelter, proving that Herbert Kordil was slipshod with his facts. But Shayne knew that Steve was in that house, was armed and would welcome a chance to shoot at Shayne if he had the chance.

What about Daminski? Was he in there, too? Shayne thought not. It looked like Daminski had sold out his junior partner and was probably miles away.

Shayne found the blind side of the house, the side with the fewest windows after which he made the obligatory sprint to arrive with a nimble stop against its wall. No shots, no challenges. So far, so good. Steve must have confidence that no one would interrupt him.

Shayne peered in the first window he came to. It was a cheerful, feminine room, probably Kerry's bedroom. Shayne knew that Max Kordil had been a widower, living alone with his daughter. A pillow on the bed with a "K-K" on it, a decorative touch, convinced him that he wasn't casing the harmless establishment of some little old lady pensioner who'd be scared out of her wits if a man with big shoulders and a

gun came bursting in on her.

Steve Kordil knelt in one corner of the room busily at work, either on some spot on the lower wall or the floorboards. There was a revolver at his side, a .45.

At that moment Steve looked up and directly at Shayne. Shayne froze, ready with his gun. His caution paid off. the man had only looked away from his work momentarily, and had not really seen Shayne. Shayne had long ago learned not to react too fast when he followed people and they stared directly at him. It was amazing how many people looked at others while enwrapped in inner thoughts and did not see what they stared at. It was a hard lesson for amateurs to learn.

Shayne moved with confidence around to the back of the house. There should be no trouble with some judicious tampering with the back door lock; Steve Kordil in the front bedroom wouldn't hear that. A set of picks came out of Shayne's pocket. He worked quickly, there was a satisfying "click" and he was into the service porch.

The kitchen was neat, empty. Was Kerry a compulsive cleaner? Everything sparkled. Good stuff, but nothing really expensive. There was a small dining room, almost a dinette, polished floors with copper wall pieces. Kerry conventional? The furnishings were way out of fashion. If Max were into lucrative larcenies, he

didn't spend the money on the house, and there might well be a stash.

He looked into the living room. Empty. Regulation size, wall-to-wall, green. Ripped at one corner. Steve had been here. The sofa and chair cushions were tossed about, with a couple of them ripped. Steve Kordil was giving the place an erratic search.

That left the hallway and the two bedrooms. Kordil worked in the front one. Shayne could faintly hear the scrape of tools. He checked the hallway and found the door to the front bedroom completely closed. Good. He gave the bath a quick peek and opened the door into Max Kordil's bedroom. Nothing.

He turned back. Daminski stood there, covering him with a gun. Daminski wisely stood far enough away to avoid being grappled with. He smiled coldly at Shayne and indicated Max's bedroom with his gun. The man must've hidden behind the bathroom door and emerged while Shayne surveyed Max's bedroom. Shayne went back to the rear bedroom and entered it. It was going to be hard to challenge Daminski.

He'd been wrong about Daminski. Well, no one could bat a thousand per cent. So Daminski was the lookout, and in a second he'd call in Steve and they could both have a go at Shayne. Except that didn't make sense. Also, Daminski wanted privacy so he

wouldn't have brought Shayne to this second bedroom and closed the door.

"Gun on the bed, please," said Daminski.

Shayne tossed his gun on the bed. The ball was in the other court.

"Nice of you to come, Shayne."

"It was the ride in the Rolls, not the chance to see your depressing face," replied Shayne.

The insult didn't bother the jewel thief. His look was clear and cold. The two men stared at each other. They were two professionals, cautious, alert, adrenalin high, muscles ready. Both had been in many, many dangerous confrontations.

"How many of the brothers are in on it?" asked Shayne.

"I'm retired."

"I hear different, Daminski. You recruit young ones and send them to New York to steal the stuff New Yorkers bought down here from the Kordils."

Daminski was no quick-retort man.

"Yeah. Well, I'm retired."

"Not nearly enough," said Shayne.

Daminski said nothing. He went to the bed, dipped his knees and picked up Shayne's gun. His dexterity was amazing. Holding his own gun steadily on Shayne he flipped the revolver and spilled the bullets out — all except one. Daminski pocketed the bullets and stepped back.

"I'm going to ask you to pick up that gun, go down the hall and say 'hello' to our friend, Steve," he said.

"With a gun with one bullet in it."

"With your gun with one bullet in it, Shayne."

"What if I don't?"

"Then you'll end up with a limp, or one arm shorter than the other, and I'll be out of prison inside of a year. That is, if the kid doesn't shoot you while I try to get a wounded man out of here."

"You think I'm going to pick up my gun with one bullet in it, walk down the hall, call to Steve, and try to subdue him."

"The bullet's your chance in case he's frisky."

"What if I pick up that one-bullet gun and shoot you instead?"

"The kid'll hear it and come. He's got a loaded gun. Yours is empty with the bullets in my pocket. Maybe you can reload it fast, maybe not. Even if you get me, I'll be able to fling mine out the window — after I kneecap you, Shayne."

It was a disabolical plan. Clever. The Kordils had decided to execute Steve and had elected Shayne as the assassin. Why not? Steve had roughed up his secretary and threatened to kill Shayne. Shayne could be expected to react by killing Steve if push came to shove. They'd paid him ten thousand dollars for it — in

diamonds. They'd even given Shayne the element of surprise — and one bullet.

"Who figured this one out, Daminski. It's a little past your level."

"Just take your gun and go get the kid. You want to help your friends, the cops, don't you? They want him bad?"

Shayne sauntered over to the bed and picked up his gun. He checked it. There was one bullet all right. Daminski's eyes were narrow now. He was ready, in case Shayne used the bullet on him instead. His forehead sweated — there was risk for him too. The underworld well knew about Shayne's quickness and deadly accuracy with a gun. But Daminski was on split second alert. A flip shot got Shayne a shot in return — plus the kid plunging down the hall with a full gun.

"You really have quick hands, Daminski," said Shayne evenly. "I never saw anybody open, empty and close a gun with one hand while holding a gun on somebody else, without looking."

"You get good with your hands, Shayne. Did you know magicians make good jewel thieves. They're quick with the hands. I can still do some magic tricks."

Shayne's compliment had warmed the man as far as a ghost of a smile as well as this information.

Shayne hefted the gun. "I suppose pickpockets, too."

"Naw," said Daminski, "They don't like people. They hide from people. No nerve."

"Your friend Herb gave me a diamond worth ten thousand. Suppose we forget this silly game, Daminski, and you go off with the diamond?"

The eyes were cold again. Daminski had exhausted his desire for social chitchat.

"Just go down the hall, Shayne, and get the kid," he said.

"And if I shoot him, you shoot me."

"Why would I do that, Shayne? That's stupid. I got no argument with you. Why kill some guy and maybe go to jail. No, I just leave."

His eyes darted sideways towards the door. *He'd like to leave now*, thought Shayne. *He's only staying to see this thing through, as ordered. He won't use the gun on me. It's an assassination set-up. Clever, but they left out one thing. I don't play other people's games.*

He turned and went out of the bedroom and down the hall, carrying his gun with the one bullet in it. Daminski followed him and waited, plastered against the wall. Shayne went to the closed bedroom door. He looked back at Daminski, flattened to the wall. The man's face was tense. Shayne felt pretty tense himself.

He pounded on the door loudly.

"Steve!! It's Shayne out here! Come out and face me, you slob!"

Daminski's face fell in astonishment. Evidently he'd expected Shayne to sneak into the bedroom and try to take Steve quietly.

There was a roar from the bedroom, the sound of scrabbling feet and a cry of inarticulate rage. Steve plunged for the door. As it flew open, Shayne was ready. He slipped the gun in his pocket, took a high step to the doorknob and went up towards the ceiling holding onto the top of the door. As Kordil rushed through, gun at ready, Shayne should be able to swing his legs and kick the gun free. Then it would be man to man.

Steve Kordil burst through the door under Shayne, gun lifted.

"Shayne — you bastard — "

He saw only Daminski and stopped in astonishment.

Daminski said: "Goddam, Shayne, you tricked me." He fired.

There was a roar of a gun with a noise that shattered Shayne's ears. The bullet smashed through the center of Steve Kordil's forehead. The corpse flew back, pinioning Shayne against the door.

Daminski looked up at Shayne, yelled something Shayne couldn't hear, and then Daminski took off. Shayne cursed and fought his way down off the door and raced to the front of the house, but he'd lost precious seconds. As before, Daminski had the fast feet of a natural athlete. There was no trace of him. Shayne raced the other

way, knowing ahead of time that Herb Kordil and the Rolls wouldn't be there. It wasn't. There was only the quiet, sunlit street, some kids playing, an airplane droning overhead. Shayne was alone with the corpse of Steve Kordil.

VI

CHIEF WILL GENTRY himself came to the Kordil cottage to look in on the official investigation of the shooting. So did the reporters, and the TV crews. The Kordil story was turning out to be a natural, a gruesome, imaginative murder involving a rich family in a glamorous profession with another killing of one of the Polish brothers, and juicy suggestions of wrongdoing with nothing proved yet. There was even the feminine angle with endless photos of the pretty fashion model, Kerry Kordil, available for visual embellishment.

"Dammit, Shayne, this one belongs to the squirrels," said the redfaced police chief, chewing on his unlit cigar. "It's a cinch that the Kordils run this reselling racket, but I've not got one single complaint on that so I can seize records and checks things out. The victims are all in New York. It'll be days, weeks, a month before somebody comes forward with a formal complaint I can act on."

"Even that's rough, Chief. Once the stolen stones are recut

you'll play hell getting positive identification. Those diamond cuts are locked in a dead brain. There were pictures. Kerry made 'em but handed 'em over to her father who destroyed 'em before he was killed."

Gentry sighed and sank into a chintz-covered livingroom easy chair with the cushion still awry. He passed a weary hand over his face.

"Run through what you've got for me, Mike. I got to face those reporters and TV types."

Shayne lit a cigarette and paced, pinching his left earlobe between thumb and forefinger.

"I'd guess the Kordils ran a sweet racket until Max Kordil made waves. They decided to get rid of him. Maybe this went on for months — then Steve got released from prison, and they saw a chance to do it and lay it off on him. They enticed him here through Daminski with the promise of money and then one of them cooled Max with a knife. I don't think Steve did it. About the only person *he* wanted to kill was me.

"They had some bad luck. Kerry, the supposed dumb blonde, stumbled onto the racket and worried enough to hassle her father. The last thing Max wanted was an investigation, but he didn't want his daughter to know what was going on. Then I showed up on account of Steve and they saw a second chance to cool Steve and

lay it off on me. That would give them a seamless out, Max killed by Steve, Steve killed by a law-abiding citizen he'd threatened. Over and out. but I didn't kill Steve, Daminski did. He's their errand boy and they told him if I didn't he had to, so he did. They're still not in bad shape, with Max gone and Steve to be blamed if they get a clever lawyer, and they will."

Gentry jumped up and paced. "It gripes my soul. We know what they did, and how they did it, yet they can walk down the street untouched. I hope you stay in this one, Mike. You might still get something from the girl we can't."

"I'm staying, Will. I have to find out who killed Max. It wasn't Daminski. If he were a killer he could easily have cooled Steve several days ago. He had to do it as a last resort ... I hope I'm clear on this, Chief."

Gentry shrugged. "No worry, Mike, it wasn't even your gun. Your story hangs. Good luck."

"Good luck, Will."

Shayne waited to collect Kerry Kordil, knowing her agony to come home to find a macabre circus that followed Steve's murder. She wept in his arms, completely shattered.

"First my father in that horrible bowling alley. Then Uncle Steve, right in my own house. I know Uncle Steve was practically a psychopath, but still — but still — "

"I would've saved him, Kerry, even if he took a shot at me. He was dangerous — but like a wild animal, easily led, easily trapped, killed."

"I know, Mike. How can I ever stay here again?"

He answered that by taking the girl over to Lucy's apartment. The warm-hearted Lucy rushed the young blonde model to bed, and told Shayne she'd act as nursemaid as she had many times before.

"It's above and beyond the call of duty," he said in thanking her.

"No," she laughed. "It's wisdom. Do you think I want a sexy girl like that staying in *your* bedroom while you feed her hot milk?"

Shayne grinned and made a pass at Lucy's fanny which missed as she ducked. Then his face got serious.

"She might be in some danger, Angel. From Daminski. Even from her uncles. Her father had a stash of money. That's what Steve was looking for. I think it exists. It could be large. Max would never have told anybody where it was. It could buy Daminski a new life in South America, which he'd appreciate right now. I didn't talk to her about it. Tomorrow will be soon enough. But she'll bear guarding."

Lucy's face got serious. "Here we go again. A case like this never seems to end, Michael."

Shayne grunted and was on

his way. As he rolled in his Buick, his thumb scratched along his usual growth of day-long red stubble. Herb Kordil was his next step. At this point, the man was the key, the one who had master-minded Steve Kordil's killing.

There was another reason why he liked Herb Kordil for the Max killing. Herb was the third of three brothers. Roger was the oldest, Max had been the second. In his intriguing "death" message, Max had pulled all but three matches out of the match-book folder. Maybe he tried to write the name 'Herb' and also left the match clue. Yes, and maybe birds flew North in the winter! But he wanted to see Herb Kordil ...

A frightened Mrs. Kordil with an old-fashioned beehive hairdo and wearing a brocade dress met him in a Bal Harbor mansion and told him her husband had flown to Houston to attend a sales convention, leaving at four P.M. that day.

Shayne already knew this from Will Gentry, but in his profession he'd learned to check and double check always. He left the woman and walked around in the driveway to the back of the house. The garage was locked but there was a light upstairs. He rang the bell. Presently a sharp-faced woman appeared wearing a maid's cap. Servant's quarters over the garage, of course.

"Where's the Rolls?" asked Shayne.

"Who are you?"

"I'm from the Rolls Agency. Mr. Kordil asked me to stop by."

"It's nine at night."

"When you buy a Rolls you get twenty-four hour service."

"What's wrong with it?"

"The cigarette lighter."

"Mr. Kordil doesn't smoke."

"That," said Shayne triumphantly, "is just the problem. It has to be removed."

"It isn't here."

"Where's the chauffeur?"

"He isn't here."

"Do you think we'd make a good comedy team?" asked Shayne.

She slammed the door on his face as he said a polite "Good-night" to it. He walked away grinning. The door opened. "Good night!" called the maid. His grin got wider as he went ...

Shayne sat in a big, black easy chair in the Kordil establishment. The back of the chair was almost as tall as Shayne. The rug under his feet was thick enough, clean enough to sleep on, Roger Kordil's desk was big enough to qualify him to head General Motors. You could go on and on about the luxury of the office of the oldest Kordil.

"You're worried about my brother's Rolls?" asked Roger, raising one black eyebrow.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Kordil. Herb's supposed to be in Houston at a sales convention. I called, and there's a jeweler's convention all

right, but your brother isn't registered. And his Rolls is gone. It costs a lot to fly a Rolls to Houston. It costs a lot to fly a bicycle even."

Roger laughed.

"You think Herb isn't in Houston, but perhaps right here in Miami."

"I'm sure of it."

Roger sat behind his big desk with his feet on the desk. The bottom of his shoes bore hardly a mark and the polish on them gleamed like diamonds. Shayne forced his mind to stop thinking about the Kordil's luxury.

"I understand the police want to talk to him about that unfortunate thing this afternoon," nodded Roger. "You do too. Let's see you're working for young Kerry."

"That's correct. She may have serious trouble. Her father accumulated a large sum of money which may be illegal. A certain Daminski who seems to know all of you knows about that money."

Roger was no longer smiling. His feet came down off the desk. He had a startling face, Shayne thought. His hair was all white but his eyebrows were black and his eyes were dead black. It gave the effect that he could look right through you.

"Where does Herb fit in?"

"He probably knifed your brother Max. He certainly tried to hire me to kill your brother Steve. He had to use Daminski. Max's money would make a nice payoff to

Daminski."

"My God, Shayne, you've got it all figured out."

"All I need to know is — where's Herb?"

Roger closed his eyes. In the silence of the room Shayne thought he could hear Roger's breathing, it was that secure and quiet. The man was silent for a long time as if coming to some decision.

"Shayne, I've known for a long time there were strange things going on in this company, right under me. It was Max that found Daminski for us. He was supposed to be part of our security system. Recent events convince me that Herb, Max and Daminski were running some game. I hate to think that of my own brothers. I've been slow to react."

"But now Herb is responsible for the death of still another Kordil," said Shayne.

"Exactly."

Roger Kordil sat forward and smacked his palm on the desk. "Mr. Shayne, I couldn't turn Herb over to the police. I also can't be responsible for Herb to do possible further harm to young Kerry because of Daminski and that money. You might be the perfect answer."

He rocked forward and searched the drawers of his desk. He produced an 8x10 glossy photo which he flipped over to Shayne. It was the picture of an attractive woman in her thirties. There was almost

as much cleavage as face.

"Herb had a dull home life, Shayne. He also has an eye for the ladies."

Shayne nodded, remembering the incident in the Rolls this afternoon.

"When Herb goes out of town to a convention, sometimes he goes to the convention. Other times he goes to the apartment of — that woman."

"A hooker."

Roger quirked an eyebrow as if the term pained him.

"I suppose she's his retreat, his hideout when there are lots of pressures. If he's in Miami, and if he isn't at home, and if the Rolls is missing — you might try her. I don't know where she hangs out. Her name is Madeleine Brewster. With your connections you might be able to find her."

"Thanks," said Shayne rising.

"Mr. Shayne," said Roger, "our business is ruined, at least temporarily. Perhaps forever. The one thing I must do is rout out this cancer at all costs. Herb's the key; I've delayed too long..."

Shayne was on the trail again, as he had been so many times before, a trail that led into that seamy side of Miami, into bars that smelled of stale beer and hosted bleary-eyed sullen men and women, into pool halls where bright-eyed cubans chewed gum with eternally moving jaws and disdainful expressions, white teeth bared in the rictus of humor-

less smiles, marijuana odors permeating the air, into curbside conversations with pot-bellied taxi drivers whose eyes darted anxiously past the person they talked to, into bright-lighted skin clubs where smooth-skinned beauties offered undulating flesh to frustrated voyeurs ...

VII

DAMINSKI FOLLOWED HIM.

It was quite late now. Shayne stopped for a cup of coffee and rubbed his heavy beard and fingered his tired eyes. He had the directions he wanted now. The woman who might harbor Herb Kordil, hiding out, was called the Brew. Her address was in a quite respectable part of town.

The only problem was getting past a rough character called the Sledge who made sure that no strangers approached the Brew. The Brew took care of a group of wealthy Miamians, and she didn't want to meet any strangers at all. She certainly was not going to welcome a redheaded private detective — not at two in the morning.

Shayne now had to add Daminski to the equation. Up ahead was a hostile courtesan protected by a savage guardian, while behind him was a professional thief and sometime killer who could complicate his search and maybe compromise it. The best of it was that at least Daminski did not have

Kerry by the throat, choking her to find out about Max's money. The worst of it was that he didn't cherish meeting Daminski twice in the same day. The puzzle of it was — why did the thief follow him?

Daminski was an expert thief and a passable marksman at close range. As a shadower he was a rank amateur. Shayne spotted him at least a dozen times. Daminski was trying; he didn't mean to let Shayne know he was there, but his technique wouldn't wash.

Wouldn't it be strange, the redhead thought, if Daminski was also searching for the hidden Herb Kordil, had discovered through his own criminal contacts that Shayne was on the trail of the mysterious Brew, and decided to let Shayne do all the work. Interesting, and the only possible explanation of why Daminski would follow him. Herb Kordil must've cast Daminski loose.

Intrigued, Shayne finished his coffee and felt the surge of new energy. If Kordil had cast Daminski loose, the whole Kordil setup was coming unraveled and was ripe for plucking if Shayne, just kept shoving ahead.

"Here we go," said Shayne as he got back into his Buick. Daminski, still in a rented car, followed all the way out of the sad sidestreets and into respectable Miami, right to the address of the fancy apartment where Shayne

had learned he could find the Brew —

And the Sledge ...

It was an expensive-looking apartment house, six stories high, with ample parking in the rear. Shayne knew that because he parked a discreet distance up the street and walked into the rear of the building where he found an open parking lot which contained a number of expensive cars. As they said, the Brew attracted a wealthy class of people.

Most interesting was his discovery of Herb Kordil's tan Rolls that he'd ridden in earlier today, sitting among the other cars, locked and empty, of course. There was no sign of the chauffeur nor of any other person back here. So far, so good. Herb Kordil was near at hand. So, no doubt, was Daminski who must've seen Shayne's car by now and would be following right along. It might be well for Shayne to reach Herb Kordil first, because if Daminski thought his former employer had deserted him things might go hard with Herb before Shayne reached him.

Shayne started back towards the apartment when two figures appeared from the shadows of the apartment. One was quite huge, over two hundred and thirty pounds, Shayne judged. He was young and walked like an athlete. The other was an older man, small, wiry, white-haired.

"Shayne?" asked the big young man.

"Yes, I've got to find — "

They moved in to take him. Shayne was able to duck only partially as the hefty young man swung. The blow glanced off the detective's jaw and stunned him. He saw a blinding flash of white light and felt pain. The wiry man slashed at his stomach. Shayne had just enough quickness to tense his strong stomach muscles and blunt the blow, but he felt that too. Shayne gave back with a roar of anger.

"Come on, Sledge, you punk," yelled Shayne and went for the big man. He snapped off a blow that the Sledge felt, but that massive hunk of muscle only shook his head and bore in. Shayne had to give back because there were two of them. The older man, Sledge's assistant, circled to one side looking for an opening.

Shayne swung a left and missed but dexterously ducked the Sledge's return punch. The second man rattled a sharp-knuckled blow off Shayne's ribs. It hurt.

Shayne tried reason.

"Listen, you fleagles, there's a killer on his way here to find Herb Kordil, one of Miss Brewster's friends, I — "

The Sledge rushed him, apparently having decided that Shayne wasn't too tough as long as he had a little extra help. A man with a physique like that

could take a lot of pounding. He came boring right in at Shayne, fists flailing.

Shayne executed a surprise maneuver. He swung to the side where the wiry man crouched, grabbed his shirt and rolled over backward, pulling the smaller man with him. Shayne's powerful legs came up and kicked. The wiry man shot through the air as if exploded by a cannon. He crashed into the side of one of the parked cars, head first, seemed to bounce back and fell to the ground, fast asleep.

The maneuver had also deprived the Sledge of his target. He swung at air, skidded to a stop and turned.

"Now it's just you and me in a private number," Shayne told him. He had not cared for the bony fists of the older man in his ribs.

The big young man merely grunted and flailed in again. He tried to kill with those sledge-hammer fists, not caring about defense. Shayne rocked him with a left, then a right. He gave him a slug in the stomach. He took two fierce punches.

"Be damned," said the kid.

He stood there blinking in the overhead light that was spooky in its thinness, and stared at Shayne. Apparently nobody had ever told him that he might meet a man who could trade punches with him on an even basis.

"Now, listen. We don't have to fight. I have a message for your boss — "

The man came in again. Shayne could almost see the new resolve on his face to get his adversary this time. Shayne was a little astonished that the man's reputation was so great. Shayne moved forward as if to slug it out with the young giant, stepping inside the arcs of those huge fists. It took nerve to do that, but Shayne had long ago learned that damage close up was less in a fight like this. He took a near-paralyzing blow in the body, then spun back to give the kid a mind-rocker on the jaw.

Shayne began to box. He hurt now, but the kid hurt worse as his grunts began to turn to wheezes. He could not box. He could not land enough blows against the agile detective. Meanwhile, Shayne's stinging lefts and rights, none of which could deck this mountain of muscle, began to wear him down. His face was flecked with blood, while there was only a trace on Shayne's face.

"You want to rest for a while?" said Shayne. He panted but he wasn't winded. "I've got extra time."

"You bastard. I've just started."

It was bravado. His will exceeded his abilities. His reflexes were slower. He landed a solid

blow on Shayne's jaw and Shayne cried out, giving back, not so much angry with his opponent as with himself for being careless. The kid yelled in triumph and flailed more vigorously.

Shayne began to cut him down now. He was bored with the match. He put the kid to his knees. The big man kept on punching from his knees, he was literally out on his feet and fighting from will. His punches had become watery and weak.

"Quit?" asked Shayne.

Those hammer fists kept moving.

"Goodnight," said Shayne. He stepped up and administered an expert karate chop to the back of the neck. It was a kindness. The lad slipped to the pavement and went to sleep.

"Whuff," went Shayne, shaking himself like a big bear, glad to finish a hard task. He walked over to the wiry man who lay quietly on his back staring up at Shayne.

"Your boy isn't too good, Sledge."

"You can't get good help these days," said the Sledge. He raised a hand and Shayne helped him to his feet. The Sledge shook his head and felt his neck tenderly.

"I pretty well ruined somebody's door panel with my head," he told Shayne. "I shouldn't've let you take me so easy with that flyer."

"No, I'm getting old. That's why I need young muscle but they sure learn slow. You know what's the trouble? The kids watch too much TV these days. They learn that it's all a matter of will. But it isn't a matter of will alone. The good guys don't always win. TV kids 'em."

"There's that," said Shayne.

The Sledge toed his muscle. "Well, back to bouncing in a bar for this one. Too much will. Too nice. He should've ripped your eyes out, kicked your balls and tried to break a knee. A flying heel's good for that."

"Would you?"

"Of course not," said the Sledge. "Why get some stranger completely mad at you? You scare 'em so they think they'll lose an eyeball or a kneecap. You learn the bad stuff and drop it. Reputation does the rest."

"Yours is still okay. So's your pipeline. You knew I was coming."

"Word got here."

The two men entered the apartment building. Shayne found himself in a long, narrow hall.

"Let's toss for it," said Shayne. "I don't want to open some door and have my head blown off by a wired shotgun."

The Sledge took out a coin and flipped it. "Call it."

"Tails," said Shayne. It was that kind of a day.

"You win," said the Sledge, looking at his wrist. "I'll call Miss

Brewster."

"What if I'd lost?"

The Sledge sighed. "I try to persuade 'em not to bother her. That's left to my judgment. In your case it's quicker to leave it up to her. I've met your type."

"Don't you want to hear my story?"

The Sledge's lip twisted. "Of course not. Whoever comes tells lies. Not as good as TV either."

"So you see some good in it."

"I love it," said the Sledge, "but it's ruining the country ... You go through that door. It's a gym, with the swimming pool on the other side of it. I'll call upstairs, and then collect my loser."

He was gone before Shayne could ask another question. Shayne went through the yellow door and found a neat little gym with all the equipment, looking lonely and deserted under lights. There were mats, exercise exercise machines, horses, rings, balancing bars, the whole business.

He crossed it and went through another door to find himself at a desk presided over by a white-coated attendant. Beyond were lockers. The man watched the all-night movies on a small TV set. He barely glanced at Shayne and tossed up a clothes basket, towel and a bar of soap on the counter.

"I'm supposed to see Miss Brewster," said Shayne.

"The pool's beyond the lockers."

"I'll find her in the pool — at 3 a.m.?" asked Shayne, surprised.

"Why not? It's her lunch hour," said the man.

Shayne found an empty locker and stripped, hanging up his clothes. Maybe it wasn't so bizarre after all. A man in a swim-suit could hardly be armed and a threat, which would be the way the Brew liked it. He put the towel around his middle and went back to the counter.

"You forgot to give me a suit."

The man didn't even look up from his movie. "They don't use suits, Mister."

Shayne was startled. "You mean — they don't — use suits," he said.

"Never seen one in that pool," came the answer.

Shayne went back to the opaque glass doors that led to the pool. He hadn't exactly counted on an interview in the buff. It lacked dignity. Still he'd come a long way to see the Brew ... While he stood there he heard faint sounds. To be exact he heard the voices of men and women in the pool beyond these doors. He'd expected the pool to be empty. Apparently this was not the case. Presumably none of the people who shouted and splashed in there wore suits. As if to confirm this information he saw a sign with warning letters:

NO CLOTHES ALLOWED
BEYOND THIS POINT.

Shayne stared down at his middle covered with the towel. There was nothing prohibiting towels. He dashed through the door, found himself in a long indoor pool which was being enjoyed by about a dozen people, frolicking and laughing. As he'd surmised, there was nothing to be seen but skin. As he stared, one young mermaid surged out of the water, trailing jets, with her breasts exposed and everything else as well. He blushed and moved forward rapidly.

At the pool's edge he discarded the towel at the last second and dived into the water. A few minutes later, acclimated to the temperature, he rested his elbows on the shallow edge of the pool and surveyed the scene, the water covering his essentials.

The people were mostly caving. Nobody was doing anything one didn't do in polite society. Their bodies were covered by water for the most part, but one could catch flashes of this and that. There was quite an exposure of the breasts of the girls who seemed not to mind. It took about ten seconds to see that they were all attractive, much more so than the men. Half the crowd were men, ordinary, the rest pretty girls.

A mermaid swam up to a position in front of Shayne. She stood up.

"I'm Miss Kelly," she said. "You'll find me in Apartment 4-D

in about an hour, if you want to find me."

"That's interesting, Miss Kelly. I'm here to see Miss Brewster."

She looked disappointed. "Well, you timed it right. She's about due." She waited a minute longer, watching Shayne. He showed no interest.

"Well, I guess I'll go back to the water polo," she said.

"Nice of you to drop by."

She smiled and swam away. Shayne decided that the females in this apartment had one narrow interest. Which was why they were here, no doubt.

A bell rang. It rang twice and there was something vaguely ominous about it. The laughter and the splashing died. The nude group swam to the pool sides and clambered out of the water. They went out the door into the locker rooms, staring at Shayne, left alone in the pool, with curiosity. They disappeared, naked fannies bobbing.

"And now a word from our sponsor," muttered Shayne. The pool seemed lonely and a little weird with the people gone. There were still waves from their activities and a lone ball bobbed in the water. Gradually the water stilled and silence fell on him like an oppressive blanket.

Nervously Shayne flexed his muscles. Suddenly the pool lights began to dim. Once the dimming started, the light went swiftly. In seconds the place was pitch black.

The effect was weird, to be standing in the big pool in a blackness so thick you couldn't see two feet. Shayne grunted in apprehension, thought of his gun back in the locker and jumped up on the edge of the pool.

The darkness didn't last. A spotlight came on to center on a door at the other end of the pool. Shayne slipped back in the water. The door opened and a woman came through and marched to the edge of the pool. At the same time soft music wafted over the water. More lights came on, but this time they were hidden movie projectors covering the walls on each side with a refreshing outdoor scene. The pool became a lake in a mountain valley; the effect quite startling and appealing.

The woman was not naked. She wore a cap and a white latex swim suit that glittered with sequins. No movie star could've made a more effective entrance. And her audience was just one — Shayne. She dived into the pool and swam gracefully to the shallow side where Shayne still stood, covered with water, elbows on the pool's edge.

When she pulled up beside Shayne, he saw she was the woman in the picture Roger Kordil had given him. Lovely, about thirty, with startling blue eyes. She pulled off her cap and shook loose a tumble of red hair that fell below her shoulders.

In that sequined suit and showing a good cleavage, she was as sexy as the nude young girls he'd seen.

"Well, Mr. Shayne. I hope you forgive my dramatics. One of the advantages of living my kind of life is that I can play silly girl games, surround myself with pleasant environments and indulge in theatrics. There are a lot of disadvantages."

"I'm sure there are," murmured Shayne. "You have quite a fancy setup here." He told her he had to see Herb Kordil. He was a private detective and it was police business. Serious. It involved murder.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said and she looked sorry. "I haven't seen Mr. Kordil in months. I understand he's in Houston.

"Then I guess I'll have to talk to his chauffeur. His Rolls if outside."

She blushed and dropped her eyes. "Even if he were here, I couldn't let you see him."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Shayne, the whole point of my establishment is to provide a retreat for certain people of Miami. A place where they can go and rest apart from the outside world. No family, no friends, no police, nothing. A sort of club. There are people who need this and they pay for it. My friends seldom get heart attacks or ulcers."

"How's the record on V.D.?"

She gasped and her blue eyes flashed. "Mr. Shayne, that was a cheap shot."

"Murder's pretty grubby," said Shayne. "Murder can even reach into rich walls like these. Kordil did an unwise thing. He tried to trap me into doing a killing for him, and another man had to do it. He made a further mistake. He tried to run away from the man who did it, and that man's also looking for him. Two of us are looking for him. The Miami Police also want to question him."

"He's not here," she said.

"He's here," said Shayne.

They glared at each other. After a moment Shayne went on: "Herb Kordil's close to being a fugitive from justice. Soliciting a murder is a high crime. If the Dade County D.A. sees it that way, your happy little hideaway is going to be in serious trouble, and fast. Like maybe before morning. The smartest thing you can do is let me talk to him, for the sake of your other people who happen not to be involved in murders."

"I won't stand for being threatened."

"If the D.A. looks at your 'club' closely, he might call it by another name, and the glamor goes out of the window."

She gave a humorless laugh and stared at the lovely mountain scenery coming from the projectors.

"You are a hard-sell salesman."

"Some of us have to live with reality, Miss Brewster."

She turned away from him, striking the top of the water in annoyance with her palms, like a little girl. Shayne relaxed. His point was won; she'd have to give in and she knew it. There was no use leaving her hung like this, however. At another time on another case, she might prove a valuable information source.

"And now for the good news," he said. "Up in my locker in my clothes is a little item that I'd like you to have. It's a small diamond, said to be worth ten thousand dollars. A man gave it to me, but I don't look good in diamonds, while you do."

She spun around to face him, the sparkle back in her blue eyes and laughter on her lips.

"Shayne, I love you. Just a little touch of rottenness, to keep you human."

"I Wouldn't go that far," he grinned.

"Come," she said, still laughing and falling against his big frame. She kissed him on the bare chest. "We will invade the privacy of Herb Kordil."

At the locker, he pulled out the felt handerchief that Herb had given him earlier that day and handed the diamond to the Brew. She stared at it, and her eyes got big.

"Ten thousand for sure!" she gasped. "I know gems. It's a beautiful yellow. Are you sure I can have it?"

She'd found a long blue robe somewhere to throw about her shoulders and Shayne got the weird feeling she looked just like Miss America in that sequined swimming suit and the robe in royal blue. The diamond animated her like a small girl being handed a very expensive, much-wanted doll. She paced and stared at it and murmured. "It's beautiful, so beautiful. You really don't want to give it to me."

"I want to give it to you," he said.

She suddenly flashed in his arms and hugged him, her soft body giving him reason to breathe more deeply. After all, he still wore only the towel.

"Oh, thank you, thank you. You dress I'll go upstairs and send word down where to come."

"Be ready in five," he said.

She took a couple of steps, suddenly whirled, came back to him and jerked the towel free of his waist. It fell to the floor. She stared at the revealed area on Shayne. She blushed and her eyes sparkled as she looked up to his face.

"Did anyone ever tell you you're a very attractive man?"

He made a dive for the towel.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact."

She ran off laughing, her blue cloak flying. "We must have a

midnight lunch some night."

"I'll keep it in mind," said Shayne, passing an embarrassed hand over his face. At least she was broader based than the other girl. Her interests were two, not one ...

The Sledge met Shayne in the gym after he was dressed and moving.

"Shayne, do you want any medicine for your cuts, or stuff for your bruises? You might as well have some as along as I got it out for the bouncer."

"I'll last till I get home."

"Shayne, if you ever want to change your job —"

"No, thanks, Sledge. I might watch too much TV and swim all the time."

"Isn't it disgusting?" said the man. "But I love it. Oh, you are to go up to apartment 6-A, top floor, on the left. Your man's up there. Elevator's down the hall."

Shayne found the apartment to be less elegant than he'd expected. Still it was sturdy middle class with a good kitchen, bedroom and bath, and a large living room. Decorations took away the institutional feel. It would be okay.

There was no sign of Herb Kordil. Shayne sighed and sat down in an easy chair to rest. His eyes felt sticky. It had been a long, long day. He instantly caught a quick, restful doze, a trick he'd learned, where his mind was awake, but just barely.

Suddenly the door flew open

and the Brew appeared, still in her cape and swimsuit.

"Herb Kordil's leaving! The doorman saw him head out of the building for the parking lot, dressed."

VIII

SHAYNE LEAPED UP his gun out, and ran for the elevator. He was wide awake again.

"There's a man out there he shouldn't meet just now!"

Shayne made the trip back down in the elevator, impatient with its slowness, yet knowing it was faster than a rush down six flights of stairs. At ground level he sped down the corridor towards the rear of the building where he'd first come in. He flung open the door and sprinted to the parking lot. He threaded his way through the cars past the spot where he'd had the fight, towards the Rolls. Thank God, it was still there!

Then he saw Daminski, standing just behind the car.

"Daminski!" he shouted.

The jewel thief swung, saw Shayne and recognized him. His hand came up and his gun roared. Shayne ducked down between two cars for a second, then rose to return the fire. He slammed off two, but he had to time to aim and they were wild.

Daminski took off with that high speed he'd showed Shayne at least twice before.

"Not this time," grunted Shayne.

He went to his knees on the blacktop, took careful aim and squeezed off his shot just before Daminski disappeared around the corner of the building.

Daminski went down with a scream of pain and rage. He scrambled to his feet almost instantly and Shayne fired again, but the target was erratic. Limping, Daminski vanished down the street, still cursing loudly.

Shayne had a greater interest in Kordil than Daminski right now. He sprang forward to catch the man in the Rolls. Then he skidded to a stop. Herb Kordil sat in the back seat, in one corner, not under the driver's wheel. Of course there was no chauffeur. Shayne knew that chauffeurs did not participate in the amenities of this hideaway.

Shayne knew there was no use to run any more. He walked up to the car and peered in. Herb Kordil smiled apologetically, staring straight ahead, his golden glasses down on the end of his nose like a fatherly professor listening to an obstreperous student. He was quite dead.

This time it was a knife, as it had been for Max, slitting through his expensive suit to the heart. There was quite a lot of blood. One more Kordil brother was gone. It had to be Roger; there was no other way. Shayne couldn't see Daminski bothering with a knife

when he had a gun and had proved he could use it. By the time Shayne had made a quick search of the parking lot and found no one, the Brew had come out. When he returned to the Rolls, she had seen what was in the back seat.

"Oh, my God," she said and fell into Shayne's arms weeping.

The Sledge appeared. "Have we got trouble?" he asked.

"You've got a murder," said Shayne, "and I'm afraid your club is busted ..."

It was after dawn before Shayne was free and reached his apartment to grab a few hours of much-needed sleep. Even so, he tried to call Tim Rourke because he knew his skinny newspaper friend was hot in the middle of the Kordil Story, having been with Shayne at the bowling alley that night when Max was killed. His answering service said he was out.

Shayne attached no significance to that until noon the next day when he called Will Gentry direct to ask if Roger Kordil had been picked up yet for the action at the Brew's apartment.

Gentry snorted into the phone. "Hell, no, and he won't be. He's got an iron-clad alibi. Last night you saw him and got a lead on where Herb hid out, right."

"Right, Will."

"Well, after that, friend Roger had an interview with a newspaper reporter. The reporter had been going after him for several days

and Roger finally granted him the interview."

"That wouldn't take all night, Will. The murder had to be committed sometime after 3 a.m. When I reached that apartment, there was nobody in the Rolls. No corpse, for sure."

"I saw the statement you made. But Roger's still out of it. You see, he owns a motor launch. He took this reporter out to sea for privacy on the interview. It got pretty late, so they played a little cards, had a few drinks and stayed out on the ocean all night. Got in about seven a.m. They were too far out for an Olympic swimmer to sneak ashore, let alone a jewel salesman over fifty years of age."

"Come on, Chief."

"You come on, Mike. It has to be Daminski or one of the other surviving brothers, or any outsider. I like Daminski, even if he did have a gun in his pocket and used a knife. He had a motive, being forced to kill that younger brother and being hung out to dry when Herb took to his heels. He had the opportunity when you scared Herb out of the building, and he was right there to pull the job."

"This reporter ... maybe a bribe?"

Gentry gave a humorless laugh. "Why don't you ask, Shayne. It was your old friend Tim Rourke!"

Shayne knew he'd have to check that out! He hung up and called

his office first, though. Lucy was there and expecting Shayne's call.

"Did you get your important business done last night with your good-looking client, Kerry Kordil?" she asked with a touch of asperity in her tone.

"How's that?" asked Shayne, startled. The last he knew he'd planted the young girl with Lucy last night.

"When I woke up this morning, Kerry was gone," said Lucy. "I found a note dated midnight. Kerry said you'd called and wanted to talk to her and she had to leave."

Angry and annoyed, Shayne told her that he hadn't called Kerry last night and hadn't seen her. He gave Lucy a rundown of the events at the Club. Lucy had seen most of it in the morning paper. Back to Kerry.

"Well, she's gone," said Lucy.

"God knows where or why," said Shayne. "Call Tim and have him meet me at the office as soon as he can. I'm rolling."

On the way he wondered who'd called Kerry last night and used his name. And if she were in trouble or danger. There were more wrinkles in this case than a dessicated prune.

At the office Lucy left for a late lunch while Shayne sat down with Tim. Tim told him Gentry had it right. Roger Kordil had taken the news reporter out to sea on his motor launch and they'd had a

darn good interview.

"We went pretty far out, Mike. Down by the Keys I think. I'm not so good at directions in a boat, especially in the black of night. It was just the two of us."

Tim said that after he'd pumped the head of the Kordil family dry, they turned to wet refreshments and a few hands of old-fashioned Gin.

"Actually I think the old boy's afraid," said Tim. "Now that Herb's dead too, he's probably half nuts. He seemed to feel safe out there on the water, didn't want to come in."

Tim explained that there was plenty of Hennessey's and the cards were going good so they played till after midnight; then Roger suggested they drop anchor and run back in the daylight.

"Which was all right with me, Mike. I had my story, a good one. When we got back this morning and I picked up the Herb Kordil murder, I had a bonus story. More about the Kordils than you'd ever want to know — and these days the city wants to know plenty. Wait till you see it."

"I know how good you are, Tim. But take me back to last night. Are you absolutely sure Roger didn't leave his boat?"

"No way, old friend. I don't sleep well on boats. I was up at one, stamping around and smoking a cigarette. Then that stupid bell they use on boats woke me up at two and I stomped

around some more. Both times I peeked, but old Rog was sleeping like a log."

"He could've stuffed some blankets under the covers."

"Bed dummies don't snore and wiggle around," grunted Tim. "Besides, there was no place for him to go. The Key was a long way off. There was another stupid island, a rock nothing, not too far away, but that was on the ocean side. Don't you see, Mike? Even if Roger did slip over to the Key, he wouldn't have time to drive to Miami, pull Herb's murder and get back to the boat. I was stirring around again at four-thirty."

Tim had to rush back to the *News* in case more broke on the Kordil story.

"Oh, Mike, one other piece of interesting information. Your client, young Kerry Kordil, was arrested once for knifing a girl. She got mad at some fashion model and went for her. The Kordil family hushed it up."

"Bad?"

"Enough of a wound to send the victim to the hospital."

After Tim left, Shayne sat there pinching his left ear lobe between thumb and forefinger. For some reason his mind shifted to the murder of Max at the bowling alley. He thought about Max's dying message. One-two-three matches, and the scratches on the score sheet. Well, it surely wasn't the third brother because Herb himself was now dead. God, he'd

like to know the answer to that one!

A uniformed chauffeur walked into his office, saluted smartly and said:

"Miss Kerry Kordil waits for you downstairs in her Lincoln. She has an important request to make of you. She is your client. She thinks you will interrupt yourself and come down to see her."

Shayne's jaw dropped. Almost automatically he used the same words he'd used in a similar situation just twenty-four hours ago.

"Do you suppose it's a good afternoon for an important request?"

"I wouldn't know, sir," answered the chauffeur.

Alert, Shayne said: "Aren't you the man that drove for Herb Kordil yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. I drive for all the Kordils at various times."

"What's your name?"

"Chambers, sir."

"Where were you last night, Chambers?"

"At home, sir. Over the garage at Mr. Herb's. I was not needed." Shayne grunted and accompanied the man down to the street. It was, indeed, like yesterday. There sat Kerry in the rear of the Lincoln just as Herb Kordil had sat there on the day before on that ill-fated trip to pick up Steve. Shayne got in the Lincoln and Chambers drove off.

"What's up, Kerry?"

"I want to go to my house near the University. I don't want to go alone. I have an idea where the money is. But please don't ask. I feel foolish talking about it. I just want to go there with somebody safe."

She looked white and drawn. To Shayne it seemed she held up remarkably well, considering that there'd been another death in her family just that morning.

"Who called you last night using my name, Kerry? Where did you go?"

"Nobody called me, Mike. I put that in the note so your secretary wouldn't worry. I decided I'd sleep better in a house I knew, so I went to Uncle Arnold's. This is his car."

"Young lady," said Shayne, "when I put you in a safe place, you'd be better off to stay there. You were loose on the streets after midnight. That's when Uncle Herb was killed."

"Oh, Mike!"

He was annoyed that she'd left Lucy's after he'd planted her there.

"Look, Kerry, I know you're not a killer, but you don't have any alibi for the night your father was killed, either. Tim dropped you off in plenty of time for you to have gone back to the bowling alley and knifed your father. Daughters have killed fathers before in the history of mankind."

"Mike!"

He wanted to shake her.

"You could've stabbed both Max and Herb. After all, you knifed a woman once in a fight at some fashion showing."

She clamped her lips together. "I won't listen to this nonsense."

He tapped her knee.

"All right. It's nonsense. But hereafter when I put you somewhere it's for a reason, for your safety. Don't get up and push out into the night on me."

She nodded sullenly.

This time they didn't have to park up the street from the little cottage. They spun right into the driveway. Shayne followed Kerry into the front door, opening it for her.

"All right, let's get busy on your ideas about the money —"

That was the last thing he remembered for a while. There was a whisper of sound behind him and then something crashed against the back of his head with such force that he dived into perfect blackness, feeling a gout of pain, absently noting that Kerry swirled expertly out of the way as if expecting this ...

IX

WHEN SHAYNE CAME TO, the first thing he worried about was his headache. It was enormous. He rolled his head around and some of the pain went away. His vision cleared.

He was in Kerry Kordil's bedroom. He was tied to a chair! Not

only were his hands and feet bound, but he was also gagged. He wiggled, but it was no use. They'd really tied him tightly.

He recognized the room. There was the bed with the pillow with the "K-K" on it, there was the ripped baseboard where Steve Kordil had been working when Shayne had inadvertently called him to his death.

Kerry sat before him on the edge of the bed. Beside her stood Chamber's, the uniformed chauffeur, still with his visored cap on. He held a tire iron in his hand.

Kerry looked different. Her eyes were as cold as Daminski's. Her soft, sensual mouth twisted into hard lines. She smoked a cigarette, staring at the detective as if he were a loathsome bug. There was a gun beside her, Shayne's own gun, taken from his shoulder holster while he was out.

"There he is," said Kerry to Chambers. "Why don't you pour yourself and me a drink before we start. This is gonna take time."

"Yes, Miss."

The chauffeur disappeared from the bedroom.

"Well, Mr. Shayne," said Kerry. "Now we can get down to essentials. Remember the old nursery rhyme — 'Who Killed Cock Robin?' We will cover that. But First, shall we dispose of the matter of Dad's money?"

Shayne couldn't do anything but nod. He had to admit that for once he was completely taken by sur-

prise. Chambers had got behind him and knocked him out at the direction of the girl. She was turning out to be far different than he'd seen her from the first. He wanted her to talk. To babble her guts out — while he twisted at those bonds behind him ...

"I knew Dad was making illicit money — and a lot of it. I found his hiding place some time ago. It was behind the stove. You'd be surprised at how lazy people are. They don't like to shove around eight hundred pound gas stoves. But all you had to do was find the string attached to the bag and lift it right out.

"When it got to be more than two hundred thousand dollars I knew it was getting too big. Out of hand. I called him on it. We had a terrible fight. But he was greedy; he wasn't going to stop, no matter what. So I took those pictures. I didn't know how I'd stop him. Then you walked in and I thought I could scare him."

Chambers returned to the bedroom with a tray with one drink on it.

It looked like a Tom Collins. Shayne squirmed, looking at the big glass. The gag made his mouth very dry.

"What a fool I was, Shayne. He couldn't be stopped — except with a knife. Anyway, after your friend, Tim, took me home I grabbed that money. Of course, Dad never came home again. I put that money in a safe deposit box and

you, or nobody else, will ever get it.

"My brilliant uncles are all so rich, with their big houses and cars, their social affairs. Dad and I couldn't have that. What I'll get from my uncles is a nickel and a smile, that's it."

She sipped her drink, staring at Shayne with hot, resentful eyes.

"What I'm going to do, Shayne, is unmask the killer and put him under for once and for all. Then I'm going to take my money and the hell with all of the Kordils and their self-importance. They're bankrupt. My grandfather was the only one who made money, and they've lost all his customers. They're broke. They had to steal to keep things going. Well, it's over now."

She picked up Shayne's revolver from the bed. She pointed it at him.

"The killer, Shayne is *you*!"

Until that moment the red-headed detective had been contemplating the awesome possibility that Kerry had done those murders. His words spoken in chastisement seemed to be coming true as this harsh, cold woman spoke. Now he was astounded.

She came forward pushing the gun in his face.

"Do you think I was fooled? Steve's coming back set you up. You knew who he was. You'd heard stories around town about Daminski and the Kordil operation. You decided to cut yourself

in on it. You beat Steve. I saw you hit him and shove his face into the car hood. I didn't catch on then. I thought you were a nice-looking man, sexy. Women make these mistakes."

She paced, slapping Shayne's gun against her thigh. She gestured at her drink.

"I'll get more ice cubes, Ma'am," said Chambers and once again disappeared from the bedroom.

"Steve filled you in, Shayne, and you disappeared from the bowling alley, conveniently passing me over to your friend, Tim. He's a nice man, not an evil, rotten beast like you. But I could never love him. You came back to the bowling alley. Steve made Dad wait under some pretext and knifed him. The two of you worked together at that point."

"You set up all that rigamarole about the matches and the score-sheet to cast suspicion on Roger. It was Roger who threw the split that night that the three matches represented. You were there when that happened and they all kidded him."

Shayne almost jumped out of his chair.

"You sent Steve to look for the money, Shayne, but of course I'd taken it already, so Steve didn't find it. But Herb and Daminski had the same idea. Daminski caught you and shot Steve. Uncle Herb hates violence. He was long gone. You got the drop on Damin-

ski, drove him out of the house, called the police. Then with your evil skills you pulled the wool over the eyes of the Police Chief himself."

"By now you realized that either Herb or myself was the road to the money. You stashed me and went after Herb. When he refused to talk, you knifed him. I figured this all out last night at Lucy's. I knew my danger; I had to get out. Of course, then I didn't know Uncle Herb was dead, but I knew you'd shake me down for Dad's money. So I left. That's when I knew I had to trap you and get your confession. That'll put an end to it."

Shayne listened to her story in absolute astonishment. It was the first time in his long, checkered-career that a client of his had tied him up, accused him of murder and threatened to beat a confession out of him. A young woman, at that.

Kerry Kordil was a dumb blonde, but she had his gun and could be very dangerous in the mindless sort of way that Steve Kordil had been.

"Chambers," said Kerry. "We'll have to torture, Mr. Shayne. You can see he's not going to talk."

"Yes, Ma'am."

The chauffeur still stood there patiently, polite.

"You'll have to find me a rubber hose, or something."

"I doubt there's a rubber hose

in the house, Ma'am."

"Well, get one, dammit. There's a hose outside, Chambers. Go get the garden shears and cut me a piece."

The chauffeur nodded and disappeared.

"Don't think I can't be tough, Shayne," said Kerry. "My safety and my future depend on my beating a confession out of you."

Shayne nodded. He had begun to enjoy this thoroughly. He was pretty sure that he'd seen the character she unconsciously imitated on some TV show or another. What was it the Sledge had said: "You can't get away from it."

"If the hose doesn't work, there are other ways," she said. She lit a cigarette and glared at him. Unfortunately her mouth could not hold a sneer any longer. It kept going soft and sensual.

"I can burn your skin," she said darkly.

Shayne nodded. The gag hid his smile.

The chauffeur returned.

"The garden shears won't cut the hose, Ma'am. Besides, I think it's plastic, not rubber."

"Well, go in the kitchen and get some straws out of the broom to put under his fingernails."

"Yes, Ma'am." Chambers disappeared.

"You see how it is, Shayne. You'll have to talk," she said.

Shayne nodded.

"But I can't take off your gag just yet," she said, frowning.

"You might call for help. That's a dilemma, isn't it?"

Shayne nodded.

Chambers returned.

"Unfortunately the broom is also plastic, Miss Kordil."

"Well, *do* something, dammit. Here — " She handed him the burning cigarette. "Burn his skin."

The chauffeur took the cigarette gingerly in his immaculately gloved hand.

"I'm afraid I'm not good at this sort of thing, Ma'am."

Shayne had finally worked his bonds loose. He stood up, pushed Kerry aside, hopped once and his fist lashed out. Chambers crashed into the wall, his visored cap flying. His eyes rolled back in his head. He went down. Shayne didn't mind. That blow with the tire iron had given him a serious headache.

"You're going to kill me!" shrieked Kerry.

"No," said Shayne, "I'm going to spank your stupid tail off, young lady."

Driving back to Lucy's, Kerry said, squirming: "Well, Mike, I did think you were responsible for all this trouble. You are big and mean looking."

"But not nearly the trouble in the world as a frightened blonde with an overactive imagination. This time you stay at Lucy's. We'll deal with the problem of that money later."

"Mike, I'm afraid I'm not much of a help."

"On the contrary, you gave me the clue I needed to point out the real killer. Now I've got to go out and get him."

"Did you know you excited me when you spanked me?" she said.

"It wasn't my intention."

"Maybe one night I could stay at *your* place instead of Lucy's, Mike."

"Maybe," said Shayne, but he didn't really think so ...

The chauffeur still sat behind the driver's wheel of Arnold's Lincoln. He had a lump on his jaw from Shayne's blow, but he looked straight ahead, ignoring the detective as he parked in front of Shayne's office. His eyes were hot, resentful — and crafty.

Chambers had a way of acting out the role his employers wanted from him — but he also was nearby when Max and Steve were killed and conveniently absent when Herb got it.

"I'm going to check up on you too, my bucko," Shayne told him.

"Very good, sir." The Lincoln drove off.

Shayne knew that Chambers gritted his teeth when he came out with that "sir."

The detective spent the rest of the afternoon and evening checking carefully on the background of all the Kordils and Chambers. Long after Lucy had gone home, he toiled at his desk,

making calls and scribbling notes. It was eight o'clock when he got a phone call he didn't expect.

"Mr. Shayne, this is the Brew — Madeleine Brewster. I — uh — assume you remember me?"

"From last night and the swimming pool, a white swimming suit with sequins. Oh, yes, I do."

She told him her Club had emptied. Her business did not stand publicity and especially a murder on the premises.

"I sent the girls away, too. I have a good woman friend in Atlanta who'd be glad to have them visit for a month or so. It seemed wise. Then tonight a man came to see me. he's here now. His name's Daminski!"

She went on to explain that the Jewel thief was wounded in the leg, and couldn't get around very well. He identified himself as a friend of Herb and Roger Kordil. He has the right keywords. He wants me to take him to Roger's boat tonight."

"How bad's the wound? Why does he want to go to Roger's boat?"

"His wound is all right, but he can't drive. He says Roger told him by phone to meet him there. I don't know what's going on, so I thought it best to call you — "

Shayne held the receiver to his shoulder while he stared out at the night lights of Miami and did some rapid thinking, scraping his thumb along the edge of his jaw with the stubble of his red beard.

Then he grinned.

"Take him to Roger's boat, Brew. But I'd also take the Sledge along, because Daminski's armed and can be dangerous."

X

TWO HOURS LATER, Shayne stood in the shadows by the pier watching the headlights of a lone car approaching to park. Here alongside of Roger's motor launch, everything was dark and quiet. High-strung lights illuminated the dock area at intervals, but it was not the most cheerful spot in the city in which to meet anybody. Various boats of different sizes bumped silently against moorings made restless by the chop of the Bay.

Shayne hoped that Daminski would arrive first, but as so often happened with his luck on this case, it was Roger who appeared on the other side of the strong wire fence that protected the dock from the public parking lot. The man was alone. Shayne caught a flash of his white hair as he moved through the gate and left it unlocked. He passed within ten feet of Shayne, eyes on the ground, bemused. Shayne let him pass.

The motor launch was less than a yacht and more than a weekender. It had a substantial cabin below, while the wheel and controls were on an open deck above, with a high pilot's chair and the protection of a large curved wind-

shield. Lights appeared in the cabin. Roger was ready for his rendezvous with Daminski.

There was another long wait before Daminski, limping, helped by the Brew, came through the gate that Roger had left open. He could be in better shape, thought Shayne. He had to lean on the redhead who wore a wine-colored pants suit that set off her figure very well. To Shayne's puzzlement there was no sign of the Sledge.

Shayne caught them right by the gate. He shoved his gun into Daminski's ribs.

"Hold it right there."

Daminski cursed, but was in no condition to resist.

"You set me up!" he cried at the Brew.

"Mike, what is it?" the girl asked.

"Keep your voices down," warned Shayne. "Roger's already on the boat."

"Listen, Shayne, he wanted me to come — "

" — to kill you," said Shayne.

Daminski stared at him. He subsided.

"Where's the Sledge, Brew?"

"Mr. Daminski wouldn't let me bring him."

"Unk," went Shayne. "That means we've got to improvise. Could you go aboard the boat, Maddy, and keep Roger busy talking for a few minutes? Tell him Daminski's limping over from the car."

She nodded and went off towards the boat.

"What's this crap, Shayne, about Roger killing me."

"He told you to come here for tonight for a payoff, right? He told you he'd found Max's money and it was yours. He'd hand it to you in cash. He'd even run you up the coast to a quiet pier where there was no chance of running into police who have an APB on you."

"How's that your business?"

"Only that I've got Max's money. He hasn't. He hasn't got much of his own money, either. Just a lot of jewels that belong to somebody else. The Kordils are bankrupt, and you know it."

"He said he had the money — "

Shayne flashed a roll of bills. Even in the dim light Daminski's eyes got big.

"So if he hadn't got the money, why would he invite you to this lonely dark place where he can stick a knife in you and putter out into the Bay and get rid of the corpse."

"That's crap!" said Daminski without conviction.

"If you'll play it my way, I can prove it."

"So prove it," said Daminski.

Shayne chuckled as he took Daminski's gun out of the jewel thief's pocket.

"I'm leaving you one bullet in your gun, Daminski. That's what you did with me that day in Max's cottage, remember? You can use the one bullet on me, but I think

you'd better save it in case Roger starts waving a knife around."

He emptied the gun except for one bullet, gave it to Daminski and told him what he had to do.

Roger scowled when Shayne came aboard alone.

"What the hell are you doing here, Shayne?"

"I thought you might welcome me," said Shayne, "since I've got Max's money."

That changed Roger's expression. His glare faded into a speculative look.

"Yes, sir, that smart little Kerry lifted it before anybody else could get to it. Then, since I'm her detective, she handed it to me for safekeeping. How about that?" Roger frowned and glanced at the Brew and then off towards the parking lot.

"Oh, don't worry about Daminski," said Shayne. "I waylaid him over there and bonked him and tied him up. I wanted us to talk. Also you know you can trust the Brew. My God, she knows half of the scandals in the city. Herb's been to her Club a lot. You've been there a few weekends yourself."

"Sure, sure."

The Brew cleverly kept her mouth shut.

Shayne protested that he didn't want to stand dockside talking a complicated deal. Roger turned and invited him and the Brew below where he served them glasses of wine as they sat around

a small table in the cabin. The hatch behind them was open.

"We can split this money, Roger," said Shayne. "I happen to know you could use a few bucks. But first I've got to know what goes on."

"You talk, Shayne. I'll listen."

"All I had to do was look around, and I could see the pattern," said Shayne. "You were doing all right with the easy money, but the risks got greater all the time. There were four of you in the act — you, Max, Herb and Daminski. Arnold and Frank didn't count. Max got greedy ... and careless. His daughter caught on, and she wasn't in on it. She asked questions. Max still wouldn't lay off. He wanted more and more. You, Herb and Daminski decided to kill him. That took a while — it's a heavy business. Then Steve got out of jail. You saw a way to kill Max and lay it off on Steve."

Roger scowled but he didn't deny anything or stop Shayne. Shayne saw Daminski's feet on the hatch stairs. Daminski listened.

"You knifed Max, Roger."

"How do you know it wasn't Herb or Daminski?" Roger merely looked amused.

"Max told me."

"What!"

"Remember the matches he tore out of the folder. They were his death message. One match on the left, two on the right. If each

match were a bowling pin they represent a split you made on that bowling game. The Kordils are good bowlers with years of experience. A split is very rare for you brothers. That was exactly the split you shot at the alley. I checked it out on the game score sheet. The scorer marked that split."

"Interesting," said Roger. "Hardly court evidence."

"Who's talking courts," said Shayne. "I'm talking money."

The Brew didn't understand much of this, but she listened quietly. Lots of this kind of information had passed her ears, thought Shayne. Still he wished the Sledge had come and he could've sent her away. It was the luck of the case. He'd simply have to be extra careful.

"Next," Shayne went on, "you had to get rid of Shayne. You gave that job to Herb and he set me up with Daminski. Why not? I had a feud with Steve, why not use it? That made me pretty mad, Roger."

"The breaks of the game, Shayne. Anyway, you got that knthead, Daminski to do it for you."

Shayne hoped that Daminski heard that, loud and clear.

"At this point," the redhead detective went on, "you decided that there was a better way. Get rid of Herb, too, and Daminski if necessary. So you did that. Right

at Miss Brewster's fabulous club."

Roger grinned. "No way, Shayne. I was out on the ocean in this boat — with a newspaper reporter. I believe you know the man, Tim Rourke."

Shayne smiled and shook his head.

"No, Roger, you did it. I checked. You're a qualified helicopter pilot. You also race cars, drive boats and hang-glide. Maybe that's why your business is weak. A little too much sports?"

Roger shook his head. "You can see there's no helicopter on this boat. Rourke didn't see any."

"No, but he saw a small island near the boat. And guess what? An obliging chauffeur named Chambers can also fly your small helicopter, which is probably not totally paid for yet. You taught him. He flew over, took your place in the bunk, you jumped to Miami in minutes, went to the Club and caught Herb at his car, trying to run from me. You knifed him, drive back to the pad and flew to the island in minutes. You sneaked back on this boat, Chambers rowed back to the island and flew the machine home. Wham, perfect alibi!"

Roger had lost his smile. Shayne went on: "It gets us to Daminski, Roger. He wants a payoff to leave the area. You haven't got it. So there's one more murder to go, and you're reasonably clear. Steve got Max, Daminski got

Steve and Herb. All wrapped up, and what anybody suspects won't hold in court."

Roger's mouth got tight. Shayne eased his gun out to where the white-haired man could see it.

"So what's your deal, Shayne?"

"There's over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars that I got from Kerry." Shayne laid a thick roll of bills on the table and watched Roger's eyes feast on it.

"That's only a sample, of course."

He went on: "We split it. I'll take care of keeping Kerry silent. She gets half of my half. Daminski gets half of your half. Everybody's happy. Daminski can take off, you can rebuild your business, and I can look for my next client."

"What other terms?"

"I want you to tell me in front of Miss Brewster that you killed Max and Herb. A witness. It's a deterrent, let's say, against future problems."

Roger stared at the Brew, frowning. Then he stared at Shayne. Shayne could see the deep violence in those dark eyes. Roger slowly reached inside of his jacket and produced a knife. It was a savage-looking hunting knife such as had been found in Max and Herb. It was as if he had to match Shayne's gun.

"No, Shayne, he said. "You get a third. I'll take the other two thirds. I've earned it. Tell me where you've got Daminski tied up and I won't have to split with anybody."

Shayne glanced at the feet of the man who listened on the stairs, unbeknownst to Roger.

"You mean, Roger you invited Daminski here tonight to kill him, not pay him off?"

"Of course I invited him here to kill him. What could I use for money to pay him with? This money's for me. With two-thirds of that money, I can get started again."

"So you did kill Herb and Max. Now you plan to kill Daminski."

"Yes, Shayne, you got it right. With Daminski gone, nobody can prove anything about the past."

Maddy Brewster's face was a study. She looked white around the lips. Her type of anti-establishment activities did not include anything like this.

Feet clattered on the stairs. Daminski came into view.

"You bastard!" he shouted at Roger. "You planned to knife me. Just like Shayne said!" His gun was up.

Roger came out of the chair, spinning the knife at ready. His arm flashed as the gun roared. Shayne had lifted the gun and moved forward, hoping he could prevent the explosion. But both these men were filled with weeks of tension, frayed nerves ready to ship them to instant action.

Once again Daminski's shot was good for a man who wasn't really a killer. He hit Roger in the middle

of the forehead just as he'd hit Steve. The force of the bullet spun Roger back across the table, but not before the knife found its mark in Daminski's chest. Roger didn't move.

Daminski stared in shock at the knife plunged into his chest. He touched the hilt tentatively.

"This is no good, Sh-Shayne."

"Twenty bullets couldn't have changed it. You rushed him. Brew, help me."

They got the wounded man to the bunk nearest at hand. There was nothing at all they could do for Roger Kordil. Daminski began to cough as his lungs filled with blood.

"Ambulance," said Shayne as he started for the stairs.

"He told the truth!" said Daminski, shaking his fist at Roger. "He did in Max and Herb. I saw him with Herb. If I don't make it, Shayne, that was the truth. I don't want that bastard to get out of it, even dead."

"Don't worry, Daminski," called Shayne as he went for help. "I got it straight and there's another witness. Roger's nailed."

It was Daminski's last break. He died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Later, as Shayne drove the Brew home, she sat close to him and shuddered.

"My God, Mike. Four of those six brothers wiped out. It's incredible!"

"As my old Sunday school teacher used to say, 'It starts out

small and grows too tall'."

"It happened that way with my Club, Mike. In the beginning I just did a favor for one rich man ... I'm glad it's closed. I think I'll sell the building and forget it. Except I don't know what else I might do."

"I'll call you for a dinner in a couple of days," said Shayne. "I might have an idea — and someone for you to meet ..."

XI

A FEW NIGHTS LATER Kerry Kordil, Shayne, Tim Rourke and Madeleine Brewster had dinner on Shayne at the GOLDEN COCK. Shayne pointed out to Kerry that she knew all about fashion modeling and how shows were put on. The Brew had capital and know how to — uh — manage young girls.

"I'd suggest a fashion model agency," said Shayne. His eyes flickered at the redhead woman. "A legitimate one, of course. The talents of you two women sort of go together."

The two women looked surprised, then pleased, and soon they babbled together busily ... until Tim stood up in impatience and reminded Kerry they had a date to play pool. Kerry went off happily with Tim, giving Shayne only a brief look of regret that the other woman had him.

"She needs people around for a while ... friends," said Shayne.

"That money will help her, too. Will she get to keep it, Mike?"

Shayne shrugged. "Gentry knows about it. If the victims or their insurance companies come around, they'll have to be paid off. If not, yes. There're taxes, too. I'd guess she'll end up with quite a lot of it, but I'm a private detective not a business manager; it's no longer my business."

"I need friends, too, Shayne. For me it's not going home to an empty house. It's going home to an empty six-story apartment

building with an olympic-sized swimming pool. I love that pool, but it's no fun to swim alone."

"I saw the mountain scenery you projected on the walls. Too bad you don't have a scene of a Southern bayou with still, clear waters, huge trees dripping moss and a soft fog hanging in the air."

Madeleine Brewster jumped up, eyes sparkling. "I have that, too, Mike. I have that, too!"

Shayne smiled in anticipation and paid the dinner bill.

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DEATH ON THE STRIP

by Gary Brandner

(Part 2 of 2 parts)

Amy Tobin shot Joe Romo twice, ran — and dropped the gun, which was found by the Las Vegas Police. In Honolulu, the girl's father, Judge Tobin, asked his friend, Detective Sammy Chung, to visit Amy and help her in any way he could.

So Chung flew to the mainland to assist Homicide Lieutenant Bert Kagle in his investigation of the case. Among the principals in the case were comedian Boots Malloy (AKA Leonard Markowitz); Amy's friend, cocktail waitress Jewell Barr; Frank Dallasandro, manager of the Camel Room at the Oasis Hotel; Lou Gaffney, Malloy's gofer; and Isobel Malloy, Boots' shrewish wife;

Sammy persuaded Amy to surrender to the Las Vegas police and give a statement to the District Attorney's office.

'I would agree that too many unexplained pieces of Miss Tobin's statement do not fit a picture of her murdering Romo. Most importantly, who was the witness, and why did he not come forward? Secondly, we have the location of the gun. It was found on the floor a few feet from the body. If Miss Tobin dropped it there after carrying it inside in her purse, where did the bit of grass on the trigger guard come from?'

"Then there's the fact that she says she fired only three shots," Kagle put in.

"Correct. No abacus is needed to determine that one bullet in Romo's brain and three in the wall add up to four."

Kagle nodded in agreement. "I think she's telling it straight. She really believes she blew the guy up."

"It would certainly appear so," said Chung. "It seems you and I have more work to do."

BOOTS MALLOY and his wife occupied a suite of rooms on the

top floor of the new highrise addition to the Oasis Hotel. At

shortly before two in the afternoon Sammy Chung and Lt. Kagle stepped out of the hot, dry sunlight into the air-conditioned interior of the Oasis. They rode up in the swift, silent elevator. At Malloy's floor they walked out into the thickly carpeted hallway across from the door to his suite.

"Do you think we should have called first?" Kagle wondered.

Chung shook his head. "Does the kingfisher warn the trout?"

"Does that mean you consider Boots Malloy a suspect in Romo's murder?"

"If Miss Tobin is not the killer, as now appears to be the case, everyone with access to the bungalows that night must be considered a suspect."

Kagle sighed unhappily and knocked on the door. Almost immediately it was jerked open by Malloy's wife, Isobel. The tall, sharp-faced woman eyed the two detectives without warmth.

"What is it?" she said brusquely.

"We'd like to talk to your husband, Mrs. Malloy," Kagle said.

"He's still asleep."

"At two in the afternoon?"

"Lieutenant, my husband is an entertainer. He works nights. I'll wake him up in another three hours. If you want to come back then — "

Kagle's voice grew cold. "Mrs. Malloy, Inspector Chung and I are

here on official police business. Please wake your husband. Now."

"Oh, very well. Come in if you must." Isobel Malloy walked away from the door and the policemen entered, Chung closing the door behind them.

The room was furnished in low, fat sofas and chairs upholstered in imitation animal fur. A curved mahogany bar occupied one corner. In another was a desk with an electric typewriter.

Isobel Malloy strode down a short hallway and through a closed door. Kagle lit a cigarette and looked around for an ashtray. Finding none, he dropped the burnt match into his pocket. After a minute the woman returned to the room, her face registering strong disapproval.

"My husband will be out in a few minutes," she said. "What is it you wanted to see him about?"

"We'll just wait until he gets here," Kagle said.

"I'd rather you didn't smoke," she said.

Kagle stared at the cigarette burning in his hand for a moment, then walked behind the bar and drowned it under a faucet.

Isobel returned to the desk and sat stiffly, eyeing the policemen. After several minutes during which no one spoke, Boots Malloy appeared. He wore a knee-length robe of orange velour. Beneath the robe his legs were bare and hairy, his feet in sandals. With his face still crumpled from sleep, he

looked ten years older than he had the evening before. He greeted Chung and Kagle with grunts and collapsed onto a sofa.

"Mr. Malloy, there are some questions we'd like to ask you," Kagle began. He glanced significantly at Malloy's wife.

"Anything you have to say to my husband can be said in front of me," Isobel told them.

Malloy nodded in weary agreement. "What's this about, anyway?"

Kagle cleared his throat several times and pretended to search his pockets for his notebook while Malloy's nervousness increased. When he was ready, he pulled out the book and began. "Mr. Malloy, your legal name is Leonard Markewitz, is that true?"

Malloy hesitated only an instant. "Sure. That's no secret."

"Did you owe money to Joe Romo?"

"Owe him money? For what? I told you I did two weeks at his club in Honolulu a year ago. That's the only contact I've had with Romo."

From her chair at the desk Isobel Malloy watched her husband closely.

Chung asked the next question. "Were you aware, Mr. Malloy, that in addition to his night club Joe Romo operated an illegal gambling establishment in Honolulu?"

The comedian's eyes flickered between his wife and the detective. "Well, yeah, I knew he

had a room going. Who didn't?"

"Did you do any gambling there?"

"Well, *did* you?" Isobel prompted when her husband was slow to answer.

"I may have stopped in the place a couple of times. Just to see what was going on, you know. I never dropped more than a few bucks."

Kagle looked over at Chung, a look heavy with skepticism. He pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket. "This is a copy of a page we found in Joe Romo's desk the night he was murdered. The name at the top of the page is Leonard Markewitz. So is the signature at the bottom. Would you like me to read off the entries?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," Isobel Malloy said before her husband could speak. "Let's hear them, by all means."

"All the dates are from one year ago. April 2 — 18,000; April 3 — 21,000; April 5 — 7,000; April 8 — 12,000; April 12 — 30,000."

"That's 88 thousand dollars!" Isobel said, staring at her husband.

"That's what it is," Malloy admitted unhappily.

"We don't have that much money."

"Don't I know it!"

"You lied to me. You promised me you were going to stay out of trouble for once in your life. I should never have let you go to Hawaii alone."

"Excuse me," Kagle broke in. "The money itself doesn't concern the police. You two can settle that between yourselves. What interests us, Mr. Malloy, is that somebody broke into Romo's bungalow last night."

"Wh-what's that got to do with me?"

"We considered the possibility that you were the one who broke in. Looking for this sheet of paper, maybe."

Malloy's mouth opened and closed silently as his hand waved a vague denial.

"Mr. Malloy, we're just asking these questions informally as a part of our investigation of another matter. However, if you choose not to cooperate we could have a warrant issued for your arrest. Illegal entry is just a misdemeanor, but it might cause you considerable inconvenience if we had to pull you in."

Malloy sagged on the sofa as though his bone structure had suddenly softened. As he spoke he avoided Isobel's eyes.

"Okay, I broke into the place about four o'clock this morning. And yes, I was looking for that sheet. Romo phoned me almost as soon as I got here Monday. He was pressuring me for the money. I tried to stall him, but he wasn't having any. He could be very ugly when he wanted to. When I heard later that somebody shot him, my first thought was that I was off

the hook. Then I got to thinking it would not look so good to have my marker turn up in his place."

"Why did you wait three days before you went after it?"

"Because there was a cop watching the door until yesterday. Listen, are you leading up to saying I killed Romo?"

"Did you?"

"Hell no! If I had, wouldn't I have grabbed the evidence at the time?"

"Maybe," Kagle said, but his eyes were hard and unbelieving.

"Besides, I can account for where I was every minute of that day. I already told you that."

"Would you mind telling us once again?" Chung asked.

Malloy sighed theatrically and spoke in a rapid monotone. "We got in from L.A. about five in the morning and went right to bed. I got Romo's call about eleven, and couldn't get to sleep after that. I had breakfast up here with Isobel and we went over my new material until four that afternoon. Then I spent an hour in Frank Dallasandro's office until Isobel came to get me and we ate an early dinner. I'm usually nervous before an opening, so at six I went back to my dressing room and played cards with Lou Gaffney to relax until showtime. I swear," he said in an aside to Isobel, "he only took two bucks off me. After that I was on stage for two solid hours. When I finished the show, Dallasandro told me somebody had shot

Romo. After that the cops came. I've got witnesses to account for me every minute of the day."

Kagle sucked his teeth non-committally. "I guess that's all for now. How about it, Sammy?"

"I think Mr. Malloy has told us what we wanted to know," Chung said.

"Listen," Malloy said, "what are you going to do about that illegal entry business?"

"That's not up to us," Kagle told him, "but as long as you continue to cooperate the district attorney may write it off."

The two detectives started for the door. Isobel Malloy strode across the room and opened it for them, stabbing her husband with an icy glance as she passed.

As they started through the doorway, Sammy Chung turned to the woman. "Mrs. Malloy, may I ask where you went at six o'clock after you and your husband had eaten dinner?"

"So I'm a suspect too, am I?" the woman said.

"It is a detective's duty, sometimes most unpleasant, to ask questions of everyone."

"I can tell you where I was, all right. I was in Frank Dallasandro's office straightening out the details that my husband was supposed to have straightened out earlier. It's lucky I checked up on him too, or the lighting would have been all wrong, they'd have been serving food during the high point of the act, and we'd have been short one

musician. Dallasandro and I went down to the show room at 7 o'clock and got things set up correctly just in time for the show to start. Then I stayed and watched the show. Anything else?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Malloy, that is most sufficient."

"Then good afternoon."

The detectives stepped into the hall and Isobel closed the door firmly behind them. Kagle instantly lit a cigarette and sucked the smoke in hungrily. He exhaled in a long sigh.

"Do you think he's telling the truth, Sammy?" he asked. "Do you think she is?"

"I believe Mr. Malloy's responses were inhibited by the imposing presence of Mrs. Malloy. Truth is as elusive as a drop of oil, but like oil, will in time rise to the surface."

"Where to now, back downtown?"

"Perhaps an interim stop at Mr. Dallasandro's office might help reinforce the stories of Mr. and Mrs. Malloy."

Kagle readily agreed, and they descended to the ground floor. Dallasandro was in his office talking on the telephone. He waved the detectives in and cut short his conversation.

"We're rechecking people's movements on the night Joe Romo was killed," Kagle said. "Boots Malloy says he spent an hour here in your office that afternoon."

"That's right. We went over the

arrangements for the show and shot the breeze in general until Isobel came and hauled him off to dinner."

"And Mrs. Malloy came back later herself?"

"Did she ever! About six o'clock she barged in and wanted to know every single thing Boots and I had talked about when he was in earlier. Then she wanted to check everything out for herself. We went down to the Camel Room an hour before show time and rearranged lights, musicians, and you-name-it until everything was just the way Isobel wanted it. Every time I see a woman like that I'm thankful I never got married the second time."

"You remained to watch the show that first night?" Chung asked.

"I stayed for about half of it to make sure everything was going smoothly. I've seen Boots work before. About nine I walked over to the bungalows to talk some business with Romo. You know what I found."

"Did you know that Boots Malloy owed money to Romo — gambling debts?"

"No, but I'm not surprised. Every time Isobel lets Boots off the leash he gets in trouble. If it's not cards, it's other women. With a wife like Isobel, who can blame him?"

"Mr. Malloy is like an injured man with a thorny crutch," Chung observed. "It hurts to walk with it,

but if he throws it away he falls down."

Dallasandro nodded his emphatic agreement as the detectives left his office on their way back downtown.

X

AS CHUNG and Lt. Kagle entered the city hall building, they met Amy Tobin and her attorney. When Amy saw the policemen, she left Hammond's side and hurried toward them.

"They let me out, Mr. Chung," she said, an incredulous note in her voice. "My father wired bail money, and they let me out."

"That is the usual procedure," Chung said gently.

Kagle glanced from the girl to Chung and said, "I'll be in my office, Sammy."

As the lieutenant walked away from them Amy turned a puzzled face to Chung. "Mr. Hammond says I'm not charged with murder, and that's why I can be out on bail."

"The charge, I believe, is assault with a deadly weapon."

"How can that be?"

"There are doubts that it was you who actually fired the fatal shot."

"But I pulled the trigger ... I saw him fall ... I saw the blood ... How ...?"

"I suggest you trust in the wisdom of the police. Despite reports in the popular press, they

frequently know what is happening."

"Don't misunderstand, I'm grateful to be free, I'm just confused about what's happening to me."

"Rest assured that all will be revealed at the proper time." Chung wished he could be as certain of this as his words sounded. "Meanwhile, I suggest you find a place to stay in town. Preferably not the Oasis Hotel."

"Yes, I intend to get a room," Amy said. "And definitely not at the Oasis. The first thing I want to do, though, is stop by and see Jewell."

"It might be wise not to say too much about present developments."

"I just want to tell her that everything is all right, and I'm not being held for murder. The poor girl must feel terrible for turning me in. She's been a loyal friend."

Chung nodded his understanding. He would have preferred that Amy tell no one that the search for Romo's murderer continued, but he could not order her to be silent.

Impulsively the girl leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. "You're a good friend too, Mr. Chung," she said. "I'm sure you had a lot to do with getting me out." She squeezed his hand and walked back to join Victor Hammond. The two of them left the building.

Chung continued to Kagle's office where he found the lieutenant adding to the mound of cigarette butts in an overflowing ashtray and scowling down at the papers scattered on his desk.

"Damn, Sammy," he growled, "we seem to be moving backward in this Romo business instead of forward. Instead of one solid suspect with motive, means, opportunity, and even a confession, we've got enough suspects to form a marching band. Not to mention a whole bunch of new questions without any answers."

"Questions, like sticks of wood, break more easily when attacked one at a time."

Kagle looked up and grinned. "Maybe I'd better try some of your oriental philosophy. How's this for a starter: As Confucious said, 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.'"

"Not bad," Chung smiled. "You have the correct sentiment, but the wrong philosopher. Thousand-mile journey was thought of by Lao-Tze in sixth century B.C."

"I guess I need a little practice," Kagle said.

Chung sat down at the side of Kagle's desk. "Suppose we take first step of journey now and attack questions singly."

"Here's one for you: presuming Amy Tobin fired three times at Romo and missed — very possible with that little gun and an inexperienced hand — where did the blood come from that she saw?"

The first officers on the scene reported bloodstains on top of the table and on the floor."

"You will recall," said Chung, "that the medical report described two wounds. There was a fatal shot between the eyes, and a second wound where the bullet lacerated the scalp but did not penetrate the skull. Such a wound would cause much bleeding, and might render the victim unconscious."

"That's possible," the lieutenant conceded. "Then there's the matter of the grass on the gun's trigger guard. If the girl kept the gun in her purse on the way in, she must have dropped it on the lawn on her way out. Since it was found on the floor near the body, somebody had to pick it up and carry it back inside. Dallasandro, maybe, when he found the body?"

"Not very likely," Chung said. "Dallasandro would have no reason for such an act. A stronger possibility is that the gun was carried in by the murderer. He must have arrived shortly after Miss Tobin. Finding the gun outside and Romo wounded and unconscious within, he divines what has happened and seizes the opportunity to shoot Romo carefully between the eyes."

"That theory has logic," Kagle admitted. "What's more, it could answer the next question, which is about the mysterious witness beyond the wall. Why didn't he

speak up? He wouldn't if he were the killer."

"The same thought entered my mind," said Chung.

"Which brings us to the payoff question ... Who *did* kill Joe Romo?"

"In reaching that answer, a possible starting point is motive. Who among our people at the Oasis had reason to want Joe Romo dead?"

"Boots Malloy, obviously," said Kagle. "A lot of men have died for less than the 88 thousand dollars he was into Romo for."

"Likewise, Mrs. Malloy may have had more knowledge of the gambling debt than she admits. Formidable women like that will often go to great lengths to protect their men."

"Then there's Malloy's stooge, Lou Gaffney, and Frank Dallasandro, who could have made an earlier visit to the bungalow. Both of them had dealings with Romo, and he seems like the kind of a man who made enemies without half trying."

"Also," said Chung, "the impression remains strong that one or more of our people is holding back information for reasons as yet unknown."

"The hell of it is, everybody seems to have an alibi. With Romo killed at seven o'clock or thereabouts, we have Malloy playing cards with Gaffney, and Malloy's wife talking business with Dallasandro. They cover each other."

Very convenient. Could more than one of them been in on it?"

"I would not think it likely," Chung said. "Murder is almost always a solitary act. There is, however, one person still unaccounted for."

"Who's that?"

"Miss Jewell Barr, cocktail waitress at the Oasis, and good friend of Miss Amy Tobin. Her involvement may be small, but like others, Miss Barr appears not to be telling all she knows."

"Maybe I ought to start pulling people in and leaning on them a little," Kagle said.

"Leaning on suspect sometimes stiffens resistance," Chung said. "Patient investigation can bring unexpected rewards."

"Sammy, I agree with you, but my chief is not a patient man. He's going to want to see some results, and soon. But for now I'm willing to call it a day and go nurse my headache. What are your plans for tonight?"

"Perhaps I will watch the comedy act of Mr. Boots Malloy. At this stage of case, laughter would be a welcome respite."

"Enjoy yourself," Kagle said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

XI

BACK AT THE OASIS Chung picked up a reservation for the eight-o'clock show in the Camel Room and rode the elevator up to the double room he occupied on

the fifth floor. There he found the red light glowing on the base of the telephone, indicating there was a message for him at the desk. He picked up the phone and dialed the switchboard.

"Yes, we have a message for you, Mr. Chung," the girl said. "It came in at 5:30, about half an hour ago. You are to call 238-9874. That's a local number."

"The caller left no name?"

"No, sir. The note here merely says that you are to return the call."

Chung eased the telephone back onto its cradle. He ran the number over in his mind, searching his memory for a connection. When he found none, he picked up the receiver again and dialed an outside line, then the number the switchboard operator had given him.

"Hello?" It was a woman's voice, guarded, under some kind of stress.

"Sammy Chung here, returning your call."

"Mr. Chung, this is Jewell Barr. Amy's friend."

"I remember you, Miss Barr."

"I'd like to talk to you this evening."

"Does it pertain, by chance, to the death of Joe Romo?"

"Yes, I mean, I think it does. I mean, I don't know if it's important or not, but I want to get something off my chest."

"Can you not tell me now?"

"There's someone ... some-

thing I have to do first."

"Very well. What time can we meet?"

"Will ten o'clock be all right? I have a break then. I can meet you in the coffee shop."

"I will be there."

The telephone clicked on the other end and the line went dead. Chung hung up thoughtfully, wondering what the information was that Jewell Barr had decided to pass on. Since she had spoken of getting something off her chest, it must be a confession of sorts. And since she had started to say, "There's someone ..." before catching herself, it meant whatever she had to tell probably involved another person. A frown marked Chung's normally smooth features. It was unfortunate that the girl would delay telling him whatever it was now that she had made the decision to talk. Many things could happen between now and ten o'clock.

Unfortunate, yes, but there was nothing to do about it. Chung bathed and changed into a dark suit for evening.

He went downstairs for dinner. Dallasandro met him in the casino and, in a burst of honesty, confided that the food was better in the hotel's main restaurant than in his own Camel Room where the meal was disposed of as fast as possible in order not to disrupt the entertainment.

Taking the manager's advice, Chung entered the dining room

and found it as yet uncrowded. He was pleased to find mandarin duck on the menu. He doubted that the hotel used the authentic Chinese fowl by that name, but ordered the dish anyway. The pressed meat in a sauce of soy and honey turned out to be quite tasty. Chung enjoyed a leisurely meal, countering the sweetness of the duck with a dry white wine.

After washing it all down with a pot of tea, Chung strolled through the ever-active casino to the Camel Room where the eight-o'clock audience was beginning to file in. Dallasandro had offered him a complimentary seat down in front at one of the V.I.P. tables, but Chung declined, preferring to sit in one of the higher tiers at the rear of the room. From there he could observe not only the show, but the audience.

Isobel Malloy also chose a vantage point near the back, Chung noted. She sat stiff and unsmiling, glancing coolly around as though counting the house while the band played something lively and a local master of ceremonies warmed up the audience for the appearance of the star.

After the warmup routine had gone on about ten minutes Chung detected a change in the emcee's delivery. He began to talk more slowly, and glanced several times into the wings. He signaled the bandleader, and there was a shuffling of sheet music on the stands as the musicians struck up

another song. Apparently the star was late.

A few minutes later the emcee marched out from the wings, smiling with renewed confidence. He waved the band to silence.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "the man you've all been waiting to see. The Camel Room of the Oasis Hotel is pleased to present that wild joker, that king of quips ... Boots Malloy!"

Malloy walked somewhat uncertainly out on the stage and positioned himself before the microphone while he waited for the applause to subside. "Good evening, folks," he said. "I can't tell you how pleased I am to be here. I can't tell you because ..." He stopped in mid-sentence, and a puzzled frown came over his face. It looked for all the world as though he had forgotten his next line.

The audience laughed a bit uneasily.

"Anyway," Malloy resumed, "I want to tell you about my flight here from L.A."

He launched into a series of airline jokes for which he was famous. Usually the crowd kept up a constant laughter during this routine, but tonight something was wrong. Malloy's delivery was just a shade off key. With something as delicate as comedy, a slight flaw in timing or intonation can destroy the whole effect. This was what was happening to Boots

Malloy. An undercurrent of noise grew in the audience as one after another of Malloy's jokes missed their marks.

When a comic is in trouble, he will often switch to his blue material. However, this needs a deft touch to keep from being merely vulgar, and for Malloy it didn't work at all. The audience laughed politely in the proper places, but all over the big room people turned to one another with a question in their eyes.

Isobel Malloy, Chung saw, seemed to be trying to pin her husband to the stage with the intensity of her stare. Her mouth was a hard straight line, and she gripped the edge of the table with taloned fingers.

Some 15 minutes into the show Isobel rose from her chair and circled around the back of the room to the door next to the stage. A waiter positioned there recognized her and allowed her to go through.

Feeling a presence beside him, Chung turned and looked up into the frowning face of Frank Dallandro.

"I was going to ask if you were enjoying the show," Dallandro said, "but after watching what Malloy's done tonight, I wouldn't want to hear your answer. I can't figure out what's wrong with Boots. I've never seen him this bad."

"Mr. Malloy's mind does seem to be elsewhere," Chung agreed.

"For what I'm paying him I should be getting a whole comic," Dallasandro said. "Mind and all. Excuse me."

The manager moved away from the table, and Chung returned his attention to the stage.

Malloy seemed to be recovering his poise a little as the show went on, but the fine edge of a polished performance was still missing. As Malloy began a bit where he exchanged insults with the band leader something bumped along behind the heavy curtain at the rear of the stage. The audience stirred, not knowing whether this was part of the act.

The curtain opened directly behind Malloy, and a girl stepped through. From the reaction out front Malloy sensed that something was happening, and he turned from the microphone just as the girl walked onstage with a strange unsteady gait.

Chung rose from his seat and stepped into the aisle as he recognized the girl. It was Jewell Barr. She was wearing her scanty cocktail waitress costume. From below her left breast a glistening splash of red spilled down across her bare midriff and soaked the bottom of her bikini.

While Malloy stood transfixed, little Lou Gaffney raced onstage from the wings and ran toward the staggering girl. She collapsed in Gaffney's arms as he reached her.

Chung moved swiftly down the broad aisle between the tables and

took the steps at the side of the stage two at a time. He crossed quickly to center stage where Gaffney knelt by the fallen girl. Malloy and the master of ceremonies were now joined by Isobel. The three of them stood looking down at Jewell, making helpless motions with their hands.

Chung stepped in and took the master of ceremonies by the arm. "Get a doctor," he said. The detective's voice carried a ring of authority quite different from his usual courteous tone. He moved Gaffney out of the way and knelt next to the girl.

"Miss Barr, this is Sammy Chung. Can you hear me?"

With a painful effort the girl turned her face toward him. As she tried to speak a froth of pink bubbles spilled from her mouth. As Chung reached around to support her head, Jewell's eyes began to slide out of focus.

The emcee called over the microphone for a doctor. Almost at-once a stout, silver-haired man responded. Chung moved aside to let the doctor examine the girl, but a long acquaintance with death told him what the verdict would be. He beckoned to the waiter who was still standing down by the door to the dressing rooms, straining to see what was happening on the stage.

"Bring security personnel," Chung said, "then call the police and ask for Lt. Kagle. Tell him he is needed here."

As the waiter hurried off, Chung returned to the knot of people around Jewell Barr. The doctor stood up slowly and turned to Chung.

"The girl is dead," the doctor said. "She's been stabbed."

Down the aisle on the run came two uniformed security guards and Frank Dallasandro. Chung walked across the stage to meet them.

"Can you do something about the audience?" Chung asked Dallasandro, noting the growing turmoil out front.

"Right," the manager said. He summoned a stage hand to help him place a screen across the front of the stage. He then stepped to the microphone and announced that due to an accident backstage the rest of the Boots Malloy show was canceled. He told them when and where to pick up refunds of their admissions.

To one of the security guards Chung said, "Take the names of everyone who was on or near the stage tonight." To the other he said, "Please come with me."

Moving with surprising agility and speed for a man of his stocky build, Chung strode to the part in the curtain through which Jewell had come onstage. The others followed at a respectful distance.

On the other side of the curtain Chung found a large, dusty backstage area with scenery flats leaning against the wall and wooden crates and boxes standing about the floor.

"May we have lights back here?" Chung said.

"Lights backstage!" Dallasandro shouted, and somewhere an electrician hit the switch that illuminated the area.

Chung immediately found the trail of bloody asterisks that marked Jewell Barr's last journey. The crimson drops marked a path roughly parallel to the curtain, then angled away toward the back wall.

Following the grisly trail, Chung walked past the door that exited on the hallway and back to a corner blocked off by several large crates. There, out of sight behind the crates, the trail ended in a pool of blood. At the edge of the pool lay a short, heavy-bladed sword stained red to the hilt.

"Do any of you recognize this weapon?" Chung asked.

"Yes," said Dallasandro. "It's a prop from our Desert Review that opens in the lounge next week. They were just delivered yesterday."

The group started at the sudden violent sound of retching behind them. Boots Malloy, grasping a dangling rope with one hand, was bent forward being copiously sick on the concrete floor. Isobel Malloy watched her husband for a moment, then turned away in disgust.

Lou Gaffney hurried to the comedian's side. "Is there anything I can do, Boots?"

"Just leave me the hell alone,"

Malloy croaked between heaves. Gaffney looked helplessly at the others, then moved back to join them, leaving Malloy to his misery.

"I suggest we retire to Mr. Dallasandro's office and await the arrival of Lt. Kagle," Chung said. To the security guard he added, "Keep everyone away from the body and out of the backstage area until the police arrive."

"Yes, sir," snapped the guard, and he immediately began clearing the stage hands, musicians, and other curious onlookers away from the scene.

Chung led the group out through the show room, where the paying customers were excitedly and inaccurately discussing the events of the evening. On the way through the casino Boots Malloy detoured in the direction of the men's room. Isobel followed her husband, but stopped short of going in with him.

When they reached Dallasandro's office the manager poured a drink for himself and one for Lou Gaffney after Chung declined. In a few minutes a pale and drained Boots Malloy showed up accompanied by Isobel who wore an expression of profound distaste.

Observing the group, each of whom showed discomfort in his own way, Sammy Chung keenly regretted the absense of the one person he most wanted to talk to — the murdered Jewell Barr.

XII

IN LESS THAN TEN MINUTES Lt. Kagle was in the office, filling the air with clouds of cigarette smoke. He and Chung took over an empty adjoining office and brought the people in one by one for questioning while the coroner's men and a crew from the lab were busy back on the stage of the Camel Room.

Boots Malloy, who looked as though he might pass out at any moment, was the first one questioned so he could return to his suite and lie down.

"No I didn't see the bro ... the girl tonight before I went on," he said in answer to Kagle's question. "I was alone in my dressing room trying to calm down."

"Something was upsetting you?" Kagle asked.

"Can't you guess? When my wife found out about the money I lost to Romo, she had a few thousand choice words to say to me."

"That's all?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"How well did you know Jewell Barr?"

"Who?"

"The dead girl."

"Hardly at all. How would I know waitresses? I must have seen her around, but they all look alike in those outfits."

"Do you have any idea who might want to kill her? Or why?"

"No idea. Look, how much longer is this going to take? I've

got another show at midnight."

"Not tonight, you haven't," Kagle said. "The Camel Room is closed."

"I've got a contract."

"You can take that up with Dallasandro," Kagle snapped. "On your way out tell your wife to come in."

Isobel Malloy perched on the edge of the chair and chose her words carefully. "No," she said with finality, "I did not see the girl at any time tonight before she walked out onto the stage. I did not come down from our suite until it was time for the show."

"I recall seeing you in the audience, Mrs. Malloy," Chung said. "You left your table, did you not, shortly after your husband's act began?"

Isobel regarded Chung intently. "That's right," she said. "The truth is that his performance was so bad tonight that I couldn't bear to watch it. I went back through the door to the dressing rooms and on outside behind the hotel. I stayed out there several minutes until I felt calm enough to come back. When I walked in there was a commotion on the stage. I ran out to see what was happening, and there was everybody around the girl on the floor."

"You saw nothing on your way through the passageway to the rear door?" Chung asked.

"No. The doors to the dressing rooms and to the backstage were all closed."

"What do you think messed up your husband's performance tonight?" Kagle asked.

"We argued earlier; it could have been that."

"Thank you, Mrs. Malloy. That's all for now."

Lou Gaffney looked like a little boy summoned to the principal's office as he sat with the toes of his tiny shoes barely touching the floor.

"I was down in the dressing room when Boots came in about 7:30," he said. "Boots was in a bad mood and said he wanted to be alone, so I went on out to the casino and pumped a few bucks into the slots. At five minutes to eight I went back to tell Boots it was almost show time. He yelled out that he was ready, and I went up to the wings where I usually stand to watch the show."

"Did you see Jewell Barr at any time during the evening?"

"Not until she staggered out through the curtain."

"Was there any unusual activity backstage?"

"If there was, I couldn't have seen it from the wings."

Kagle wrote in his notebook, then looked up suddenly. "What did you think of Malloy's performance tonight?"

"I've seen him better," said Gaffney.

"Any idea what the problem was?"

"Nope. He was edgy before the show, and locked me out of the

dressing room, but that's not the first time."

Kagle excused the little man, and Frank Dallasandro came in. The manager's tie was loosened and his collar was damp with perspiration.

"Did Jewell Barr check in for work tonight before she was killed?" Kagle asked.

"Not according to the bar manager. He's her boss, and he told me she hadn't shown up, as far as he knew."

"Were you backstage at all during tonight's show?"

"Just for a minute to talk to my lighting man."

"Did you see anything?"

"Nothing unusual, but then I didn't look around much."

"Okay, Frank, that's all for now," Kagle said. "Thanks for the use of the office."

"You can keep it for a while if you want. I've got to get out there and straighten out the refunds."

As Dallasandro left, Kagle crumpled an empty cigarette pack into a ball and dropped it into the waste basket. He ripped open a fresh pack and lit one. "What do you think, Sammy?"

"I cannot believe that none of these people saw Miss Barr at some time during the evening."

"That's what I think, but which one of them is lying?"

"Sorry to say, the untruthful one has not yet revealed himself."

One of the coroner's men appeared in the doorway. "I

thought you might like to get the official word on cause of death, Lieutenant," he said.

"Let's have it."

"Massive hemorrhage and shock resulting from a deep stab wound just below the heart."

"Does the sword found at the scene match the wound?"

"We'll be able to tell for sure at the autopsy, but we're 90 percent sure. The thing isn't real sharp, but a good shove would do the job."

"Is it not unusual," said Chung, "for someone so gravely wounded to rise from the spot of the stabbing and walk the several yards necessary to emerge on the stage?"

"It's unusual, but not impossible. Sometimes after a traumatic shock the victim will spontaneously come out of it after a lapse of time. This gal would be pretty weak from the blood she lost, but she could have made it."

When the coroner's man was gone, Kagle said, "It looks like whoever shoved the sword into the girl thought she was dead when she hit the floor backstage."

"It must have been a shock to the killer when she walked through the curtain," said Chung. He told Kagle then about the telephone conversation with Jewell early that evening.

"And the girl said she had something to do before talking to you?" Kagle said.

"Slip of tongue indicated Miss Barr planned to see someone else before talking to me."

"The murderer maybe. And she was killed to prevent her from talking to you."

"A distinct possibility," Chung agreed.

"Is this tied in, do you think, with the murder of Joe Romo?"

"Since the same group of people is involved, I would say it is most probable. Although she did not say so, the information Miss Barr had for me almost certainly concerned Romo's death. You recall that she contacted me immediately after Amy Tobin presumably told her that the case was open again."

"Which reminds me," Kagle said, "one suspect we can scratch this time is Amy Tobin. I put a tail on her from the time she left the station. She stopped to see Jewell Barr at her apartment, then checked into the Boulevard Motel and hasn't been out since. I thought you'd like to know."

"That is refreshing news," Chung said.

"I could use some refreshing myself," Kagle complained. "This case is giving me a boxed-in feeling. Nobody sees anything or knows anything, everybody's got an alibi, nobody's guilty of anything. I'm getting sick of these people, Sammy."

Chung was pensive for a moment before he spoke. "The feeling grows that the key to

unlock this mystery lies somewhere in the past of the people involved. In Las Vegas everyone exists in a bubble of the present, with no history, and no future. While you carry on the investigation here, perhaps I will do some checking into the past of our people, trying to bring backgrounds into focus."

"I appreciate the offer, Sammy, but it shouldn't be necessary for you to do all that traveling. We can wire the police in cities where these people have connections and let the local cops do the questioning."

"That is standard procedure," Chung agreed, "but questions are only half-formed in my mind, waiting to crystallize at face-to-face meetings. Such tentative instructions would place an unfair burden on our colleagues in other cities."

"I see your point. If you don't mind making the trip, it *would* be better to have you on the scene. My files should give you enough names to start on."

"That should prove most helpful," said Chung. "All of us leave bits of ourselves with other people as we travel through life. Fitting those pieces together can give a truer picture than the one in the mirror."

XIII

THE NEXT DAY, Saturday, Sammy Chung arrived at Los

Angeles International Airport with a short list of names and addresses of people connected to the principals in the Romo/Barr murder cases. In a car rented at the airport he drove to the first address on the list — an aging apartment building of scabrous yellow stucco in the shadow of the Hollywood Freeway.

Chung's visits to Los Angeles were frequent enough that he was not shocked by the changes in Hollywood. Still, he would admit that he much preferred the city in years past when Hollywood Boulevard was a sparkling, glamorous thoroughfare where movie stars sometimes strolled among the common folk. Modern Hollywood had suffered the same blight as New York's Times Square and San Francisco's North Beach. The boulevard was lined with tawdry shops, and the strollers were hippies and Jesus freaks, runaway kids and dirty old men. But never a movie star.

The name that went with the Hollywood address was Nathan Barr. Chung had chosen this as his first stop because it promised to be the most difficult. Only last night Nathan Barr had been officially notified of his daughter's death. It was not a pleasant time to talk to people. It was, however, a time when people often spoke without their built-in censors. Chung got out of the car, climbed the concrete steps to the apartment entrance, and walked in.

The odor of meals cooked and eaten long ago by people long gone permeated the walls and the worn carpet. Overpowering all was the sour smell of loneliness. Chung located the groundfloor apartment occupied by Nathan Barr and knocked lightly on the door.

"What is it?" came a ragged voice from inside.

"It is about your daughter, Mr. Barr."

There was a grumble of complaint from inside the room then the sound of feet shuffling across the floor. The door opened and a man peered out with blinking, watery eyes. A few strands of hair lay across his skull, and several days' worth of beard grew like white fungus on his face. His breath was heavy with the sour-sweet smell of wine.

Sammy Chung held his badge and identification out for the old man to see. "I am Inspector Chung of the Honolulu Police, working with Las Vegas authorities. I offer my sympathy on the death of your daughter."

"It was bound to happen," Nathan Barr said, "considering the people she ran around with." He beckoned Chung into the room and dropped onto a sagging couch covered with a gray blanket.

"You did not approve of your daughter's friends?"

The old man stared down at the backs of his hands where the veins stood out like blue worms. "What

difference does it make what I approve or don't approve. When Jewell went off on that fancy scholarship she went out of my life forever. It wasn't easy for me, raising a daughter alone after her mother died. Do you think I ever got any thanks? Do you think she ever paid back any of the money I put out to feed her? Not on your life. Not that I would have taken the money from her, mind, but she might at least have offered."

"When was the last time you heard from your daughter?"

"Hell, I don't know. Months ago. She never wrote to me, never came to see me. Too good for her old man. That's a laugh. Big Las Vegas dancer, and now she won't even write to me."

Chung did not contradict the image Jewell Barr had wanted to leave with her father. Winding up as a waitress must have hurt more than she admitted. "Did you ever visit Jewell in Las Vegas?"

"Nah, what do I need with that town. Bunch of hustlers is all they are. Hustlers and phoneys. Maybe that life was fine for Jewell, but not for me. I've got some pride."

"Thank you for your time, Mr. Barr," said Chung, heading for the door.

"Yeah, sure. Time is one thing I've got plenty of." The lonely, bitter old man stood in the doorway staring at nothing as Chung walked out of the apartment and back to the rented car.

The detective's next stop was in

sharp contrast to the seedy neighborhood where Nathan Barr lived. Called Century City, it was a complex of gleaming highrise buildings that had sprung up just off the lower tip of Beverly Hills. Chung drove down the Avenue of the Stars to the steel and glass building that housed the offices of Gilbert Silverman, theatrical agent.

Chung rode the elevator up to the 16th floor accompanied by a soft wash of recorded music.

A cold-eyed receptionist looked him over and said, "Mr. Silverman is much too busy to see anyone without an appointment. What is the nature of your business?"

Chung opened his wallet to display the badge and ID. "Police business," he said. Something in the deep, gentle voice made the receptionist decide that Mr. Silverman was not so busy after all. She sent the detective right in.

Silverman's office was as modern and shiny as tomorrow. The agent himself sat behind a wide desk, plump and bald, with thick glasses that distorted his eyes into staring chocolate drops.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Chung," he said.

"I am inquiring about one of your clients, Mr. Boots Malloy."

"A good man, Boots. A funny man with the right material. He went through a couple of rough years, but we're starting to hit big now. Boots opened this week

at the Oasis in Vegas."

"I have seen his act there," Chung said. "In these 'rough years' you speak of, what caused the problems?"

"Human weakness, that's all it was. Boots always had an eye for the girls, if you know what I mean. Girls and gambling he couldn't leave alone. That wasn't his main trouble though. Jeez, if gambling and chasing women could stop a guy, half the acts in show business would be wiped out."

"What was Mr. Malloy's main trouble?"

"That wife of his, that Isobel. She caught him once with a cigarette girl up at Tahoe and walked out on him. That's not so bad, but when she walked out she took Boots' jokes with her. She writes all his stuff, you know."

"So I have heard."

"When Isobel left, Boots tried to make it without her, but the truth is he doesn't have the natural talent of a banana. Without Isobel writing for him I couldn't book him into a laundromat."

"Can you tell me anything about Mrs. Malloy?"

"Practically nothing," Silverman said. "Her and I don't get along. I know she's sure not the type you'd expect Boots Malloy to hook up with. She must be ten years older than him to start with, and even in her best days that face and figure wouldn't win any prizes. She can put funny

words in his mouth, though, and I guess if you're a comic that makes up for a lot. If you're interested, Isobel's got a sister living over on Larchmont. I've never met her, but I can give you the address."

"That would be most helpful," said Chung. The receptionist brought in a card and Chung copied the name, Edwinnna Newell, and an address.

The neighborhood where Isobel Malloy's sister lived was yet another of the many faces of Los Angeles. The houses were large and sturdy and old, set well back from the street with carefully tended lawns and stately royal palms along the parking strip. At one time, when the city was younger, the families of wealthy merchants and bankers lived here. Now the old houses were partitioned into apartments. The residents, like the neighborhood itself, were aging with dignity.

Edwinnna Newell was as plump and soft as her sister was angular and dry. When Chung introduced himself and stated his business she ushered him into a small, tidy living room.

"My, I hope Isobel hasn't gotten herself into any trouble," she said. The merry twinkle in her eyes said she considered that a remote possibility.

"No personal trouble," Chung smiled. "It is in connection with another matter that I am seeking information about your sister."

"I don't know what I can tell you, Mr. Chung. Isobel and I haven't seen much of each other over the years. I'm more of an easy-going type, while Isobel has always been a driver. Too much so, I think, but it's really none of my business. She drove her first two husbands right into the grave. But before they died, they were successful. Oh, my, yes, they were successful. If there's one thing Isobel knows all about, it's success."

"Have you met her present husband?"

"Boots Malloy, the comedian? No, I never met him in person. I saw him once on the Merv Griffin Show. I can't say I cared too much for him, but Isobel and I always did have different tastes in men. My own Henry, bless him, was a quiet sort, not ambitious, but he was a good provider. A plodder, Isobel called him, but he was right for me."

Chung thanked Edwynna Newell and walked back out to where his car was parked on the quiet old street. He pondered how very different two sisters could be.

Two more names remained on his list, but neither of them in Los Angeles. Chung drove downtown to a Cantonese restaurant where he had eaten on earlier trips to the city. There he renewed his acquaintances with the owner and enjoyed an excellent meal of seafoods prepared in the oriental manner. Afterwards he returned

to his hotel near the airport so he could get an early start in the morning on visiting the remaining people on the list.

XVI

AT TEN THE NEXT MORNING the airliner carrying Sammy Chung descended through heavy gray clouds to the Seattle-Tacoma airport. A steady April rain drizzled over the land, making the surrounding trees glisten with healthy green, but turning the people into hunched, scurrying figures.

Chung purchased a plastic raincoat in a shop inside the terminal and rented another car. As always, he selected an inconspicuous sedan of a neutral color. When working he did not wish to attract attention. At home and for personal business it was different. There he drove the jewel-like aged Oldsmobile, taking an owner's pride in the admiring glances the car received on the streets of Honolulu.

He drove now to the Ballard district of Seattle, one of the city's older neighborhoods. Originally it was occupied almost entirely by Scandinavians, but now the ethnic character was less distinct.

The small house where Chung pulled to a stop was neat and freshly painted. Colorful flowers grew along the front, and starchy lace curtains hung in the windows. It was the home of Mr. and Mrs.

Clifford Gaffney.

A woman answered the door and smiled at him questioningly.

"Mrs. Gaffney?"

"Yes."

"My name is Chung." He held out his identification. "I am here on behalf of the Las Vegas Police. I would like to ask several questions about your son."

"Louie hasn't been hurt?" the woman said quickly.

"He was quite well when last I saw him."

"Please come in, Mr. Chung. Like all mothers, I'm always happy to talk about my boy. Louie was home last weekend, you know."

"No, I did not," said Chung.

"Oh, yes, Louie comes home every chance he gets. He had a few days this time before he had to be in Las Vegas. His father and I both enjoy having him here." Mrs. Gaffney was a woman of 60 or so whose face, despite the age-softened contours, retained a vestige of beauty from her youth. Her eyes sparkled with affection when she spoke of her son. "I'm sorry my husband isn't here, but it's inventory time for him down at the store."

Chung followed her into a bright, comfortable living room. Everything looked as though it had just been dusted.

"I'm so glad that Louie has found a good position at last," Mrs. Gaffney said. "He's always tried so hard to make something of himself. When he had that

television show we were all so happy for him. Then it was canceled. I guess they always are sooner or later, aren't they. But Louie didn't give up. He kept on plugging, and how he's personal manager for Boots Malloy."

Sammy Chung nodded and said nothing. If a waitress wanted to call herself a dancer, and if a "gofer" promoted himself to personal manager for the parents' sake, so be it.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, Mr. Chung? Or maybe you'd rather have some tea?"

"Nothing, thank you. I have to be leaving soon to catch my plane."

"That's too bad," Mrs. Gaffney said, sounding as though she really meant it. "Maybe some time you can stay in town longer."

"I should like that," said Chung. Then, steering the conversation gently back to the subject, he added, "Are there any more in your family, Mrs. Gaffney?"

"No, Louie was an only child. He was a terribly bright boy, but always so sensitive about his size. That may be why he never married. It's too bad, I would have enjoyed having grandchildren."

"I understand he was once engaged," said Chung.

"That's right. It was a girl from right here in Seattle. Little bit of a thing. Louie brought her home several times, they were so cute together."

"The romance came to an end?"

Mrs. Gaffney sighed deeply. "Yes. Louie never did talk about what happened, but around a year ago he quit mentioning her, and I guess she found someone else. Louie tried not to let on, but I could tell he was awfully hurt. He still visits the girl's parents. He was over there last weekend. I've never met them, but I'm sure they're fine people."

After once more declining Mrs. Gaffney's offer of refreshments, Chung drove back through the misting rain to the airport. In the back of his mind a picture was beginning to develop out of the bits of memories and opinions from the people he had talked to in the past two days. Perhaps the focus would be sharpened by what he would learn at his final stop.

Reno, Nevada is an older, smaller, quieter version of its more flamboyant neighbor to the south, Las Vegas. Reno was a lusty frontier gambling center while Vegas was little more than a desert watering hole. Reno had its casinos, yes, but there the gambling was done in a more relaxed, almost small-town atmosphere without the huge show rooms and the stars with six-figure salaries.

Sammy Chung's destination in Reno was a quiet residential neighborhood near Idlewild Park. There he located the apartment building in which Ruth Dalla-

sandro lived. Behind the building were two tennis courts and a swimming pool. It was beside the pool that Chung found her, a tanned, athletic looking woman with streaked blonde hair and a humorous mouth.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Chung," she said, offering him a firm, cool hand. "If I may say so, you don't look like the usual run of people my ex-husband associates with."

"That is not surprising," Chung said, "since our association is only incidental. I am with the Honolulu police."

"The police? Has Frank been into some mischief in Hawaii?"

"Not that I am aware of. My current interest is in the murder of Joe Romo."

Ruth Dallasandro removed her sun glasses and studied Chung with interest. "No kidding, did somebody finally step on that snake?"

"You were not among his admirers, I take it."

"I most definitely was not. He did have them, though. Women, all shapes and sizes and ages went for Joe Romo. And he made the most of it. Whatever it was that Romo had that turned women on didn't work on me for some reason. Not that he didn't try. It made no difference to Romo that Frank was supposed to be his friend. All he cared about was adding me to his string of conquests."

"Had your husband known Romo a long time?"

"Longer than he knew me. They came out west together from Chicago or somewhere. Frank was always evasive about what he did back there, but I got the impression there was some kind of a mob connection in his past. Frank decided to stay in Las Vegas, and Romo went to the islands to make his fortune. They got together maybe once a year, which was still too often for me."

"How long have you been separated from your husband?" Chung asked.

"It'll be six years in November. I always celebrate our divorce on Thanksgiving Day. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Chung, Frank was always good to me in his own way. The life in Las Vegas was simply not for me. People age too fast there without ever growing up."

"Have you seen him recently?"

"Not in six years. Divorced means finished as far as I'm concerned. I never could understand couples who go on seeing each other after the marriage has gone down in flames. I hear Frank's doing well now, and I'm glad for him. I have a life of my own here — a good job and all the social life I want. Our marriage may have been a bust, but our divorce has worked out just fine."

Chung shook hands once more with Ruth Dallasandro and, having checked the last name off his list, headed back to Las Vegas.

XVII

IN MOST CITIES of this country, Monday is back-to-work day, a renewal of the commercial activities that were interrupted for the weekend hiatus. In the casinos of the Las Vegas Strip the only visible change is a slight falling-off in the number of customers as the weekend tourists have returned to their homes to face their own realities once more. It is on Monday that the local people — those who gamble at all — take their turn at the tables. Otherwise, the scene is unchanged. The slot machines still whir, the roulette wheel spins in its oiled bed, and the dice bounce gaily on the felt-covered tables. Time does not exist in the casinos. No clock is ever seen.

Sammy Chung dropped a quarter into a slot machine and pulled down the spring-balanced handle. Fruits, bars, and bells whirled past the windows as the cylinders spun. One by one they chunked to a stop. Orange ... orange ... lemon. Chung sighed philosophically as his coin dropped into the bowels of the machine. A fool and his money, he told himself, never become old acquaintances.

Chung turned from the slot machine and walked through the small lobby toward the coffee shop for a morning appointment with Lt. Kagle. As he passed the reservation desk the lieutenant

came up to join him, looking rumpled and gloomy as ever.

"Welcome back, Sammy," he said. "You covered a lot of ground in two days."

"Let us hope that the end of the journey is near," said Chung. The two men continued into the coffee shop, took a table, and gave a waitress their orders — blueberry pancakes for Chung, black coffee for Kagle.

"Has anything new developed here in my absence?" Chung asked.

"Nothing worth mentioning. I questioned everybody again, one at a time, and there was no change in their stories. It's funny that everybody had an alibi for Romo's murder, but nobody has one for Jewell Barr's. What do you think are the chances that they were done by two different people?"

"The chance of two people in the same circle being murdered in the same week by different killers is small."

"But what about the different murder methods? Romo was shot and the girl was stabbed."

"A professional criminal will stay with the same *modus operandi*," said Chung. "The amateur uses whatever tools come to hand. Note the opportunistic use of the gun dropped by Amy Tobin to kill Romo. The property sword used to dispatch Miss Barr could have been another convenient discovery, or its location may have been known and counted on

beforehand."

"Speaking of the sword, the autopsy confirmed that it was the murder weapon. It was packed in a crate with a dozen others close to the spot where the girl was killed."

"A further indication," said Chung, "that the killer was familiar with the backstage area."

"Unfortunately, that doesn't eliminate any of our hot suspects. Malloy and his wife, Lou Gaffney, and Dallasandro all knew their way around back there."

"I trust that, as usual, no fingerprints were found on the weapon."

"Only the girl's, made when she pulled it out of her chest. The coroner says it was a near miracle that she was able to get up and walk."

"Too bad the miracle did not last another ten seconds and allow her to speak."

"That would sure make our job simpler."

"The case has had its difficult moments," said Chung. "Some day I must return and enjoy your city under more relaxing conditions."

"You're leaving?"

"I have just made my airline reservations to Honolulu."

"Well, I can't blame you for wanting to get back to the islands. I'll be sorry to see you go, especially with two unsolved murders on my hands."

"I do look forward to returning

home," said Chung, "but professional pride would never permit me to abandon an unsolved crime."

Kagle leaned forward across the table, his eyes alert. "You learned something? I've been talking so much I haven't given you a chance to tell me what information you picked up on your trip."

"There was no single piece of incriminating evidence," said Chung, "but fragments I collected should enable us to piece together a picture of the killer quite soon."

"Soon?" Kagle repeated. "How soon?"

"Tonight, if all goes as hoped for. I will need your cooperation in arranging a small gathering."

"You've got it," Kagle said. "You wouldn't hold out on me, Sammy, if you know who the killer is?"

Chung smiled. "To withhold information from a colleague is like tying one hand behind the back. At present I have only the suspicions of a Chinese detective. Tonight, with your help, I can prove or disprove them. Imagine the loss of face — a serious matter for orientals — if I told you whom I suspect and was subsequently proven to be wrong."

Kagle smiled in spite of himself. "All right, Sammy, I won't press you. I might as well admit that while you were gone I called a few people to ask about you. What they told me was pretty impressive. On the strength of

your reputation, I'll go along with your plan this time. What do you want me to do?"

"It is heartening to hear that others have high opinions of my abilities, although I am now put in the position of having to live up to them. If convenient, I would like Mr. and Mrs. Malloy, Mr. Gaffney, and Mr. Dallasandro to join us this evening at seven in the bungalow where Mr. Romo met death."

Kagle sucked on his cigarette, then nodded slowly. "I suppose that can be arranged. I can't officially order the people to come, but I can let them get the impression that it would be a bad idea for them to refuse."

"Excellent police procedure," Chung said.

"What's the plan?"

"The murderer's whole defense is like a house of cards. If one at the base is plucked out, the entire structure will fall. Tonight I hope to remove the supporting card called *alibi*."

"That won't be easy to do since their stories back each other up."

"Perhaps under stress the mutual support will weaken."

"Maybe so, but even if we crack somebody's alibi, that only proves they had the opportunity."

"Since we already know that the means — Miss Tobin's gun and the prop sword — were available to everyone, an interesting idea to explore this evening will be motives. Some things I

learned on recent travels may shed light in dark corners."

XVIII

IT WAS NOT a happy group that assembled that evening in the bungalow where Joe Romo had died a week before.

The normally smooth exterior of Frank Dallasandro was showing cracks. He kept peering out across the golf course toward the hotel as though worrying about how the Camel Room was doing without his direct supervision.

Boots Malloy chewed incessantly at his bitten-down nails, spitting out the invisible particles. He mentioned several times that this had better not take too long since he had an eight-o'clock show.

Isobel sat by herself, stiff and even grimmer than usual. When she spoke at all it was in harsh monosyllables.

Lou Gaffney was no longer the ebullient little man full of cheerful enthusiasm. He sat quietly, almost swallowed by the armchair.

Amy Tobin looked around at the others with a hurt and bewildered expression. Chung reflected that no matter what the outcome, Amy would never again be quite the same girl.

Lt. Kagle was giving the group a vague and unconvincing explanation of why they had been brought there, but all eyes kept straying to Sammy Chung as

though everyone knew it was his idea. At five minutes past seven Chung stepped to the center of the room and took charge.

"I want to extend my thanks to all of you for coming this evening," he began.

Dallasandro gave a short, barking laugh. "The lieutenant made it sound like if we didn't come we'd be locked up."

"I'm sure Lt. Kagle did not mean to mislead you," Chung said smoothly, "but it is true that your presence here may be most helpful in clearing up the two recent murders at the Oasis Hotel."

He turned to Amy, who was staring down at the spot where Romo's body had lain. "Miss Tobin, I will ask you now to demonstrate for us your movements immediately after you fired at Mr. Romo."

"After?" said Lou Gaffney from the depths of his chair. "Why not before?"

"For our purposes," Chung explained, "it is Miss Tobin's actions immediately following the shooting that are important."

"I was only asking," Gaffney said with a strained smile.

Amy walked to the writing table where Romo had sat a week before, and began to speak in a voice that was drained of emotion. "I stood about here when I fired. When ... when he fell, I turned and ran back toward the door. I went through and ran out onto the lawn."

"Will you show us, please?" said Chung. As Amy walked outside he motioned for the others to follow.

"I ran across the lawn in this direction," Amy continued, "toward the driveway. When I was about right here," she stopped at a point near the center of the grassy patch. "I saw someone walking along the wall over there by the golf course. It was about as dark as it is now, and I could only see an outline as the person turned and looked at me. I started running. Later, I realized I had lost the gun somewhere."

Chung took over the narration. "Police laboratory tests indicate that the gun was dropped here on the lawn. Let us presume that the watcher from the wall saw Miss Tobin drop the gun, and came over to pick it up." Chung pantomimed the action of picking up the weapon. "He then enters the bungalow." With one hand extended before him as though carrying a pistol, Chung walked back inside and over to the writing table. Kagle herded the others along behind.

"Finding Mr. Romo wounded but alive, the intruder seizes the opportunity, and carefully finishes the job." Chung bent down, pointed his forefinger at an imaginary forehead, and made a clucking sound with his tongue. He straightened and continued. "The murderer then wipes the gun clean of fingerprints, drops it

on the floor, and leaves the scene, confident that when Miss Tobin is apprehended she will confess, believing that her shots killed Mr. Romo."

"All very fascinating," Malloy said sarcastically, "but I've got my own show to do."

"Shut up, you fool!" Isobel Malloy snapped with sudden viciousness. "For once in your life pay attention, and maybe you'll learn something."

Malloy reacted as though he had been slapped, but he made no reply. Lou Gaffney stared at him for several seconds, then looked away.

Chung said, "This demonstration was merely to acquaint you with the probable way in which the murder was committed." He let several seconds elapse before going on. "It is only fair that I now tell you the police believe the killer is one of the people in this room."

Frank Dallasandro took an angry step forward. "What are you saying?" he demanded.

"You're out of your mind," Malloy snapped.

Isobel Malloy scowled at her husband. "Let's listen to what the man has to say."

Lou Gaffney straightened in his chair and asked, "Are you making a formal charge against anyone, Mr. Chung?"

"Not yet," said the detective. "However, I advise you now that none of you are obligated to

answer any questions, and anyone wishing to consult an attorney may do so."

When there was no response, Chung continued. "Let us examine motives for a moment. Who among you had sufficient reason to kill Joe Romo?"

Malloy opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again at a sharp glance from Isobel.

"Miss Tobin, of course, had the classic motive ... the woman scorned. However, evidence seems to show she did not commit the crime, even though she believed herself to be guilty.

"Probably the second best motive was yours, Mr. Malloy — the \$80,000 you were being pressured to pay Romo. Men have killed for less."

"Are you accusing me?" Malloy demanded.

"I am pointing out that you had reason to kill Joe Romo," Chung answered calmly.

"Well you can just forget it," Malloy said. "I didn't go anywhere near Romo that day, and I've got witnesses to prove it."

"Which returns us to the subject of alibis. Mr. Malloy, I believe you stated that at this hour last Monday you were in your dressing room playing cards with Mr. Gaffney."

"That's right, ask him."

"I have. How much did you tell me you lost in that game?"

"Hell, I don't know. A couple of bucks, maybe. We weren't playing

for any kind of real money, just to pass the time before the show started."

Lou Gaffney started to say something, but Chung went on quickly before he could speak. "We have conflicting stories here, Mr. Malloy. When I talked to Mr. Gaffney he made a point of telling me he let you win at cards that evening."

Malloy's eyes flicked to his wife and back to Chung. "So maybe that's the way it was. Who remembers?"

"It would be better if you did remember, Mr. Malloy. With doubt cast on your alibi, you would have the three requisites for a prime suspect — motive, means, and opportunity." Turning to Kagle, Chung asked, "What do you think, Lieutenant?"

Kagle picked up his cue. "I'd say we have enough to take him in for further questioning."

"Wait a minute!" cried Malloy.

"You wait a minute," said his wife. "Are you sure you're telling the whole truth?"

Lou Gaffney leaped to his feet. "Listen, Boots and I were playing gin in his dressing room for two hours that night. I'll swear to that if you want me to. What difference does it make who won or who lost?"

Malloy seemed to sag where he stood, like a balloon with some of the air let out. "Thanks, Lou," he said, "but let it go." Then to Chung: "The story of the card

game was my idea. I talked Lou into covering for me in case anybody asked. But I did *not* kill Joe Romo."

"Why, then, did you need a cover story for that period — from six to eight o'clock?"

"Yes, dear," said Isobel Malloy in an ice cold voice, "tell us what you were trying to hide."

"I was with a woman," Malloy whispered, staring down at his shoes.

"You were with a *woman*!" Isobel's voice was like the crack of a whip. "You dirty, lying —"

"If you please, madam," Chung cut her off, "we have things to settle here that are much more important than marital arguments." To the dejected Malloy he said, "This woman who spent those two hours with you, will she be able to account for your whereabouts?"

"No, she won't," said Malloy flatly. "She's dead. I was with Jewell Barr."

"Unfortunate," said Chung. "Dead ladies provide no alibis. You told us you did not see Miss Barr on Friday, the night she was killed. Would you care to revise this story?"

"I saw her," Malloy said, talking to the floor. "She came to my dressing room just before the show. She said the other girl had been released, and Jewell wanted to tell the police about us being together that night. I argued with

her, asked her what good that could do anybody. All she said was that she wanted to make a clean breast of things. I—I knew what Isobel would do if she found out, but nothing I said could change the girl's mind."

"You don't know the half of it, mister!" Isobel Malloy snarled.

Malloy winced, but went on with his narration. "When I could see there was no changing Jewell's mind I just went out and left her there. I was a little late in going on stage as it was. I guess my performance that night showed the state of my nerves."

"You say you left Miss Barr in your dressing room," Chung said.

"I did, and I swear she was all right. Lord knows I didn't want my wife to find out about us, but I wasn't going to kill the girl!"

"Let us leave that question for now," said Chung. "With your permission I shall present one more demonstration."

Once again, at Chung's direction, the company trooped outside and stood on the lawn in front of the bungalow.

"Miss Tobin, please stand where you were when you saw the figure approaching along the wall."

Amy moved to a point halfway between the bungalow and the driveway. "I was about here," she said.

"Now, Lt. Kagle, I would like you to take the part of the person seen by Miss Tobin. Go back to

ward the hotel for a short distance, then come this way on the other side of the wall."

Kagle crossed the driveway, walked through the gate onto the golf course, and continued back toward the hotel until he was lost in the darkness. As the six people on the lawn watched intently, he walked slowly back toward them, his shape a silhouette against the glow of the Strip. When he reached a point roughly across from the others Kagle turned to face them.

"Is that what you saw the night you ran out of the bungalow, Miss Tobin?" Chung asked.

"Yes, that's what I saw," the girl said. "But not quite. Something was different."

"What was different, Miss Tobin?"

"There wasn't ... so much of him. I mean, I can see the lieutenant's head and shoulders, and half the chest. The last time all I could see was a head. I remember because I had horrible dreams of that head sitting all by itself on top of the wall."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Chung called across the yard. "You may rejoin us now." To the group he said, "Earlier today I measured the wall behind which the mysterious figure appeared. I

found it to be exactly four feet, five inches high. Lt. Kagle is a man of average height, or perhaps a bit more, as are Mr. Malloy and

Mr. Dallasandro. Mrs. Malloy too, for that matter. I am somewhat shorter than all of them, yet my shoulders come well above the top of the wall. In order for only the head to be visible as someone walked along the wall — "

"Hold it!" Lou Gaffney cried, stepping quickly toward Chung. "Are you leading up to what I think you are?"

"I would estimate your height as five feet three inches, Mr. Gaffney."

"Almost five-four," Gaffney said.

"At that height, if you were to walk along the wall as Lt. Kagle did, only your head would be visible, as described by Miss Tobin. I would also point out that when Mr. Malloy's alibi was destroyed, yours went with it. Would you care to tell us your true whereabouts?"

"I was in my room. And before you ask, no, nobody saw me. Why are you trying to pin this on me, anyway? I had no reason to kill Romo."

"That is debatable," said Chung. "Yesterday I visited with your mother in Seattle, and facts came to light that could give you a strong motive for killing Joe Romo."

"My mother doesn't know anything," Gaffney said.

"Not enough to directly injure you, but what she told me made it possible to fit together other bits of information. The result was to

reveal a surprising connection between you and Romo."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gaffney said, but the life had gone out of the little man's voice.

"Your mother talked to me of your fiancee, a Seattle girl. The same one you once mentioned to me. You did not tell me the girl's name, nor did your mother, but I am now sure that her name was Nancy."

Gaffney said nothing, but a flash of pain crossed his face.

"Nancy was the name of a girl Joe Romo married a year ago. The girl he married and rejected, leading her to suicide."

"That's right!" Boots Malloy exclaimed. "Lou's girl came over to see him when I opened at Romo's club in Honolulu. Romo made a play for her, and she went for it. I didn't know she was the same one he married. Lou didn't mention it naturally. And I sure didn't know she killed herself."

"When did it happen?" Amy asked.

"Nancy Romo walked into the ocean and drowned late in the afternoon a week ago last Friday. The news is not generally known. You, Miss Tobin, left the island that morning, so you were not aware of her death. The authorities had been unable to locate Romo to inform him. The only people who had received the news were Nancy's parents. Mr. Gaffney visited them and undoubtedly

learned then of Nancy's death. It's perhaps understandable that he would blame Romo."

For the space of a dozen heartbeats the group stood like so many wax images on the lawn before the bungalow. Then the silence was broken by a low, wailing cry. Lou Gaffney, his hands balled into fists, twisted his small body like a soul in torment.

"All I wanted was for Nancy to be happy," he said in a voice that seemed torn from his throat. "It almost killed me when Romo took her away from me. But I found I could live with it. As long as he didn't hurt her. When Nancy's mother told me she'd killed herself, I swore that Romo would die for it. I knew he was going to be here at the Oasis because Boots had told me he was worried about the money he owed him. Monday night I walked over here to Romo's bungalow. I hadn't even thought about how I would do it, I just knew I was going to kill him. When I saw the girl run out and drop the gun, I picked it up and went in. Romo was unconscious, bleeding from a wound in the head. I shot him between the eyes."

"And Jewell Barr?" Chung said quickly.

"I'm sorry about her, I really am. It's like once you've killed you become hardened, and killing the next time is easier. I heard her and Boots arguing in the dressing room Friday night before the

show. I heard her say she was going to tell the police about her and Boots. That would leave me without an alibi, and once the police investigated some more they'd find the connection between Romo and Nancy and me.

"I tried to talk Jewell out of saying anything, I even offered her money. She started to look at me strangely then, and I think she was beginning to suspect the truth. I took her across the hall and through the door that led backstage. I told her we could talk privately there. I knew the swords were in a crate there. I picked one up and stabbed her."

For several seconds the only sound to be heard was the traffic up and down the Las Vegas Strip. Lt. Kagle moved to Gaffney's side and took his arm. To Lou Gaffney it didn't matter any more. Tears flowed freely down his unlined cheeks, making him look more than ever like a little boy.

XIX

THE NEXT MORNING in Kagle's office Sammy Chung shook hands with the Lieutenant. Chung wore his dark traveling suit. His leather bags stood on the floor at his feet.

"It's been a pleasure working with you, Sammy," Kagle said. "Or maybe I should say, watching you work. You solved the case almost single-handed."

"What success I achieved was

only because my semi-official status allowed me to travel freely to gather crucial testimony. Without doubt your estimable police force would have uncovered the murderer within a very few days."

"Thanks," Kagle grinned. "I only hope someday I get loaned to the Honolulu P.D. and can help you solve one. Before you leave, I'm curious about when you first suspected Gaffney. Did you spot it when Amy Tobin first said all she could see over the wall was a head?"

"Regretfully I admit that bit of damaging evidence escaped this humble detective until much later when I measured the wall to confirm suspicions. My first doubts about Mr. Gaffney arose when I asked the people where they were at the time of Romo's murder. All of the others accounted for a goodly portion of the day. Gaffney alone narrowed his answer down to the very time when Romo was killed. Since this news had not been given out, the only people who could know were Miss Tobin and the killer."

"You'd think that with all my years as a cop," Kagle said, "that I'd be smart enough to figure that out."

"Living in this city," said Chung, "you should know better than most that one grain of luck is sometimes worth more than a rice field of wisdom. Good-bye, my friend." •

THE LAST PASSENGER

by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Donna was Frightened Enough Because There Was a Mad Killer Loose in the City Streets. And Now, Here It Was Late at Night, and There Was This Gaunt Man Following Her!

ON DECEMBER 3 the police made an arrest in the Monroy murders. The suspect was a young drifter and petty criminal named James Woelz. From the picture of him the papers had printed and the brief flash of him the TV news minicams had caught as he was being hustled into the courthouse for arraignment, he looked like the kind of depraved animal who could have strangled nineteen randomly chosen women over a two-year period. One of the papers hinted that he'd confessed, but no one had yet explained why the murderer had shattered a two-ounce vial of Mon Roi perfume over the body of each victim — the scent whose name, mispronounced by a variety of official spokesmen before the media microphones, had become the

popular name for the killer.

Across the state women breathed prayers of thanks, and of hope that the reign of terror was over. Donna Roberts was one of those who believed that it might not be.

Thirteen nights after the Woelz arrest, she stared out from behind her clerk's cage, across the checkerboard-tiled floor of the waiting room to the panoramic window. Dully she watched the snowstorm whiten the street and the opposite sidewalk and waited for the electric clock above the entrance to show midnight when she could lock up the bus station. She hoped the 12:05 wouldn't be too late. Then she wondered why she cared, what difference it made when she got back to her small empty apartment and the

loneliness that was her only companion.

The station was deserted. No sensible person would be traveling on a wretched night like this. The only signs of life she could see through the front window were occasional late pedestrians struggling against the wind-whipped snow, and every so often an auto slipping along the slushy street. From the boulevard three blocks north she heard the roar of city snowplows fighting to keep the thoroughfares clear. The heat in the station wasn't working right, and the chill of the storm crept into the room and her bones. She shivered, and counted the minutes, and wondered if the weather would keep Mr. Gaunt away.

That was her name for the tall graying man with the hunted look in his eyes. Between 11:30 and midnight on the third Saturday night of each month for the year she had had this job, he had entered the station, come up to her cage and purchased a one-way ticket to Colton City, two hundred miles north.

Then he would sit quietly on one of the bare wooden benches, staring down at the floor or into himself, until the 12:05 lumbered into the departure area behind the station. He would stand up slowly and join the tiny knot of passengers on the last bus out, usually the last person in line except for Donna herself who had

to turn out the lights and lock the exit door before leaving. On the bus he always sat alone, never read a paper or anything else, at least not on the twenty-minute stretch between the station and the stop where Donna got off. He just gazed out the window at darkness. She knew he must return to the city after each journey because he repeated the trip each month, but he never bought a round-trip ticket even though it was a dollar cheaper.

Whenever he looked into her eyes across the bars of the clerk's cage she saw something in his face that almost made her tremble. She hoped he wouldn't come tonight, or if he did that he wouldn't come until just before the bus left. She did not want to be alone with him in the echoing station.

The clock above the door read three minutes to midnight and she had already done most of the locking up for the night when he came in.

He wore leather gloves and a belted brown all-weather coat, its shoulders sodden with snow. He stamped his overshoes on the rubber doormat and crossed the waiting room to the clerk's window, moving slowly like one wading through waist-deep water. She bit down on her lower lip to keep from screaming.

"Colton City," he said as he tugged out a brown cowhide wallet. "One way. Hope I'm on time."

"The bus will be about half an hour late tonight. The driver called in awhile ago." Her voice sounded hoarse and shrill. She handed him a ticket and cleared her throat. "Please excuse me, I — I have to finish locking up."

She slammed down the plastic window over her cage, double-checked the ticket compartments and the cash drawer, pulled on her coat and scarf and boots. Then she went out through the door to the baggage shed, locking it behind her, circled the building, keeping underneath the overhang so as to avoid the snow, and re-entered by the front door. She left it unlocked, as if she needed an escape route, and stood only inches away from it, breathing hard.

Mr. Gaunt came over from the ticket window toward her. He kept his hands in his coat pockets and his eyes lowered, as if he were ashamed of what he was going to say or do. She came close to racing out the door in terror.

"Miss — Miss Roberts," he began. "That is your name on the plate by your window? Donna W. Roberts?" His voice was soft, hypnotic. He stopped about four feet from where she stood.

"Mrs. Roberts," she corrected him mechanically. "I'm a widow."

"You don't want to be alone here with me, do you?" He didn't seem hurt or offended, just curious and somehow concerned for her.

"I — I don't know why, I'm just very tense and on edge tonight," she told him. "About everything. Oh, I hate the cold and the dark. They make me think of dying."

"I won't touch you," he said gently. "I understand how you feel. But look, there's no reason you have to be alone with me. The bus has to pass the all-night cafeteria on the corner before it turns in here. Even on a night like this there should be a few people in the cafeteria, so you'll feel safer." He waited a few seconds before continuing. "May I buy you a cup of coffee, or hot chocolate?"

Something buried inside her responded to the soft voice and the injured-animal look in his eyes. "That — would be nice," she said. Anything to get the two of them out of this building!

"I'll just step outside," he suggested, "and wait on the street for you till you finish locking up." She moved aside to make room for him, and at the door he turned and smiled bleakly. "Thank you," he said, and walked past the window out of sight.

She counted twenty, then pulled down the blinds on the door and front window, slipped the CLOSED sign across the door glass and went out into the blowing snow. Her fingers twitched as she turned the key in the lock. She squinted down the drift-strewn sidewalk towards the inter-

section and saw him standing under a streetlight, hands still in pockets, swaying in the fierce wind. As she approached he moved away, towards the lights of the 24-hour cafeteria on the corner, and stamped his feet in the recessed doorway until she joined him.

There were only a few customers, night people sitting hunched over tables in the vast high-ceilinged eating area, but the heat and the smell of coffee were wonderful. They pushed their trays along the railed steel counter and selected pastries to go with their hot drinks. As he led the way to a table near the street-side window from which they could see the bus when it passed, he jerked his head in the direction of two blue-uniformed men sitting near a heat duct and eating heartily. "Those officers should make you feel better," he said softly. "The city prowl car men on night duty like to grab their dinner here."

"I'm not afraid any more," she said. "Not so much anyway. I guess it was just the strangeness of the whole situation. It's been a while since a man asked me out."

"Then this must be a city of blind men," he said, and sipped his coffee. His left arm hung limp as he sat; she hadn't noticed anything wrong with it as long as he'd been standing and with both hands in his pockets. "But it's been a long time since I asked a

woman out, too."

She sensed some tragedy in his past and was sure he had sensed something similar in hers. "You can tell me about it if you'd like," she said.

His torn and haunted eyes seemed to retreat to a far place. "It's been bottled up too long. I can't tell the story yet, but — but I've never come so close to talking about it as I feel tonight." He chewed on his pastry and his glance flicked out the streaky plate glass window. "How about your tale of woe? How did an attractive woman like yourself get that hard shell of isolation to fit so tight?"

"Nothing unusual. Only what happens to everyone sooner or later. I had a man, a wonderful man, and we were married three months. Then one night after work while he was driving home to me he had a sudden heart seizure and lost control of the car. He hit a light pole and was killed instantly. That was two years ago. There hasn't been another man since."

The gaunt man squeezed his eyes shut for a moment. "The world's a dreadful place," he said slowly. "I know. But it's the only world there is. Don't you think it's time you said goodbye to your memories and started to live again?"

"What, get involved with some other man who'll leave me or die and make me go through all this again?" Her voice rose in

remembered despair. "Thanks, I'll just stay the way I am."

"I know how you feel," he told her. "I'm still fighting to start over again myself." He rubbed his left arm with the fingers of his right hand. "And at my age and with a bum flipper to boot."

"Was it an accident? War wound?"

"The woman I loved tried to kill me," he said, as the overdue bus roared in low gear past the cafeteria window. "Come on, if we don't want to be stranded here for the night."

THEY WERE THE ONLY ONES who boarded the bus at the station. The driver was a powerful-looking man with pale red hair and a savage scowl, a man new to her, probably just assigned to the route recently. Donna and her companion sat together near the back of the bus where the driver and the scattering of other passengers couldn't hear them. They snapped out the amber overhead light and watched the phantom shapes of the post-midnight city slide past the windows. She waited for him to pick up the thread of his story but when he spoke again he seemed to have changed the subject.

"What do you think about Monroy?" he asked.

She wasn't sure what sort of answer he was looking for. "What do you expect? I've been terrified the whole two years he's been

loose just like every other woman in the state."

"And that fellow Woelz they picked up two weeks ago — do you think he is Monroy?"

She began to be frightened at the gaunt man's questions, the way they were striking too close to home. "Well," she answered noncommittally, "there don't seem to have been any Monroy stranglings since the third."

"But isn't it too soon to be sure? Remember, the Monroy killings have been spaced out, ten days to six weeks apart. And how about the geographic spacing? The murders have been spread all over the state, but Woelz didn't have a steady job and didn't own a car." He paused a moment before asking his next question. "So how could your brother have gotten to all the places where Monroy strangled a woman?"

"I don't know," she said dully. And then with a gasp she realized that somehow he had discovered what she thought was her secret alone, and her eyes bulged in terror.

"There's a subtle facial resemblance between the two of you," he explained. "For my own good reasons I've studied the photographs of him in the papers rather closely since he was arrested, and when I looked carefully at your own face tonight I wondered whether you and he could be related. The middle

initial W on your name plate and your telling me you were a widow confirmed my hunch." He leaned closer to her, speaking almost in a whisper. "In strictest confidence, do you think your brother is guilty?"

"He is not guilty!" she replied intensely. "I know he's been in and out of trouble with the police since he was fifteen and ran away from home, but he's never done anything so — sick and vicious as these Monroy killings. He'd have no reason to! He may be a small-time criminal but he is not a madman. I've visited him in jail and he swears to me that he's innocent. But he's been drifting so much that he can't conclusively prove his whereabouts at the time of any of the murders and the police are determined to hold him as long as they can to keep the media from criticizing them for not solving the case. I've offered a lawyer all my savings to defend him."

"I believe you," the gaunt man told her quietly. "If you are convinced he's innocent, then so am I. And I want to help you prove it if you'll let me." He fell silent for a minute, but his eyes seemed to burn more brightly, like a dying fire renewed by fresh fuel, as he went over in his mind what he would say next.

"After all," he said casually, "anybody can purchase a vial of Mon Roi. And if, while your brother was still in jail, another

woman was to be strangled with a vial shattered beside her body..."

His words flooded her mind with new terror. The bus slowed to a crawl at the edge of the city, stopped to let off two men, then lurched onto the entrance ramp for the Interstate. Her stop was only three miles away now. Maybe six minutes more of this nightmare conversation, and then she would be free.

He let another silence fill the void between them. Then he spoke again, softly as before. "Do you care for your brother enough to offer yourself as Monroy's next victim?" He flexed the fingers of his right hand as the darkness burned in his eyes.

Inside herself she knew then, and her heart thundered. Either this gaunt man was the real Monroy or else the genuine strangler had somehow given birth to an imitator, and whichever was the truth, the man with the haunted eyes was going to kill her tonight.

She shrank into the corner of her seat, willed her hand to reach up and tug the communication cord directly overhead, bring the bus to a halt, scream for the driver to help her. Fear froze her hand muscles. The cord might have been hanging ten miles in the air for all the good it did her. The Foster Boulevard overpass slid by above them. Her stop was in sight now, yes, yes, yes, the driver would be expecting her to get off

and would know something was wrong if she didn't. And then she remembered. The driver was new on the route, had never seen her before, didn't know her stop! And the company pass that she'd displayed instead of a ticket was good statewide. She kept saying to herself: *He can't be, he can't be!* — and staring at the gaunt man's left arm and wondering wildly if he could strangle a woman one-handed.

He seemed to remember from earlier journeys the stop where she usually got off. "Ride with me awhile longer," he said. "Please?"

She was too terrified to reply, sat frozen in her seat as the bus slithered past her stop.

"Why are you so frightened of an old cripple?" He smiled ruefully and edged closer to the aisle to give her more room.

If only she could signal for help, scream, anything! The bus swung north, away from the suburbs, out into the open darkness like a long dim-lit cage on wheels.

The gaunt man sat still and looked down at his overshoes. When he spoke again it was in a monotone so close to inaudible she had to strain to catch his words. "Loyalty, thy name is woman," he said. "I didn't think you'd take me up on my little offer." He gave her another bleak, dead smile and withdrew into himself, tucking his chin into the collar of his all-weather coat.

Donna's lips were blue with cold. She sat as if paralyzed, listening to the sound of her own trembling, still unable to believe this was happening to her as the bus hurtled through the snow-scape of the night.

The gaunt man sat perfectly still as the miles slipped under the wheels of the bus. He hardly seemed to be breathing, and Donna fought to suppress a hysterical giggle at the idea that he might have died in his seat. They were in wild country now, the driver keeping up a moderate but steady speed through the veil of falling snow. The window gave her a view of cold pale light shimmering behind a cloudbank. Hidden moon. She wondered if she'd ever see the moon again.

Time seemed frozen like her fingertips and the darkness might have lasted for years. Then through her terror she sensed some change, some difference in the view through the window. It was lights! Just a few clusters of light in the far distance but bright like diamonds against the darkness of the valley. "We're almost there," the gaunt man said, and she shook as if a corpse had spoken. For the rest of the run they sat that way, side by side, their bodies almost but not quite touching, until the snow-shrouded bus squealed to a halt in the arrival bay of Colton City's station.

The gaunt man eased himself to

his feet, stepped out into the aisle. "It was nice chatting with you," he said, nodding slightly to her. "Have a safe trip back." He moved stiffly down the aisle to the front door of the bus.

Donna forced herself to sit motionless until he had entered the station. Then she struggled to her feet and made herself follow him out of the long cage. The red-thatched driver gazed at her strangely as she passed his little cubicle. She paused in the waiting room doorway and threw quick glances around the barnlike shed. The building was all but empty and the gaunt man was just exiting through the front door at the far end of the station, going out onto the city's main street. She kept herself sheltered in the rear doorway until he was out of sight. Then, her legs still supporting her only tentatively, she crossed the high-ceilinged waiting room and fumbled with the front door and went out into the chill night. Several blocks down the street she saw the brake lights of an Owl cab glow like rubies at a boulevard stop.

The gaunt man was gone. Back into the nothingness he'd come from. The nightmare was ended and she could go home again.

Then someone tapped her on the shoulder from behind, and her heart almost stopped.

"Pardon me, miss." She half-turned to face the new horror

with a scream forming on her lips. When she saw the man — young, tall, badge prominent on the breast of his snow-crusted blue uniform overcoat — she almost fainted with relief. "Anything I can do to help? It's a bit late for a woman to be out on the street alone."

"Oh, thank God!" Her body rocked and shuddered like an epileptic's now that the danger was over. "That man, the man who went off in that cab, he rode up in the bus with me and it's Monroy, it's Monroy! Go after him, go get him and put him away!"

The young officer grasped her shoulders, trying to steady her while he spoke soothingly. "Don't worry, miss. You're going to be all right. I know who that guy is and I know where he's going. We can find him if we want him. Now tell me, what happened on that bus?"

He guided her back inside the station and they sat on a plastic bench near a clanking radiator, drinking machine coffee from cardboard cups. She told him what had happened since the gaunt man had entered the downstate terminal just before midnight. He kept nodding as she talked, as if he understood the story without needing to hear it. "Uh-huh," he said when she finished. "Yeah, it all fits. I know you won't believe this, Mrs. Roberts, but you never were in real danger. It was all in

your mind, or almost all of it. Your gaunt man has a lot of psychological problems but, believe me, he's not Monroy. He's a patient at Shrub Meadows, the private halfway house for the mentally ill."

"You sound as if you know the man," Donna said, welcoming the burning sting of the coffee as she took another swallow.

"In a way I do," the policeman replied. "I was a security guard at Shrub Meadows for a year while I was waiting for a vacancy on the city force. The man's name is Stevens. He came into some money and his wife and her boy friend tried to kill him and make it look like an auto accident, but they screwed it up and wound up dead in the wreck themselves. He came out of it with his arm paralyzed and a lot of dark places in his mind, especially where women are concerned. He checked himself into Shrub Meadows, where no one could threaten him again. He's been in and out for the last year or so. When he feels okay he signs himself out and takes the bus downstate somewhere, the city he came from, I guess: But on the third Saturday night of each month — that was when his wife and her buddy tried to kill him — it all comes back to him too strongly and he buses back up here — can't drive with that bum arm — and checks himself in for another week or ten days. It's a regular pattern. This night

every month I can practically set my watch by him."

"Oh, the poor man," Donna said softly. "No wonder he seemed to identify with Monroy. He must see that madman as some kind of Robin Hood or vigilante figure, avenging women's injustices to men."

"Something like that," the officer agreed. "But I can tell you for absolutely certain, miss, he isn't Monroy. When the strangleings began two years ago, Stevens was still in the hospital with that paralyzed arm. One of the psychiatrists at Shrub Meadows wondered about that when I was still working there, and had me check it out. Stevens is just a very frightened and very lonely person. I can see he's charged with assault or something if you want me to, but considering his mental problems the courts wouldn't convict."

"Oh, no, I don't want that," she protested. "I just wish I could have helped him somehow."

"I don't think anyone can help him," the policeman told her. Then he looked at his wristwatch and stretched to his feet. "Uhhh, it's getting close to four A.M. and that's when the next bus south leaves. You'll feel better when you're safe home."

They walked across the waiting room to the single open ticket window, where Donna displayed her company pass and received a pasteboard for the return trip. The

young officer shook hands with her, patted her shoulder reassuringly and went back out into the tail of the night. Donna bought a newspaper from a vending machine in case she felt like reading on the southbound bus. She glanced at the stories, but there wasn't a word about her brother or Monroy.

A few minutes before boarding time she stood and joined the handful of shivering travelers waiting for the bus at the departure gate. When she handed her ticket to the driver, she felt a moment's shock when she saw he was the same scowling carrot-top who had driven the 12:05 north. She took a seat in the rear, pressed the recliner button on the chair arm and leaned back with her feet snug and warm against the radiator unit. Almost before the bus had left the station she was in an exhausted semblance of sleep.

Very dimly, as though from far away, she could hear the low throb of the engine, the hiss of heaters, the whine of tires on the highway. The smoothness of the sounds told her that state snowplows must have cleared at least one lane of the southbound Interstate. She drifted in and out of sleep, keeping her eyes closed, losing all sense of time. Every so often she felt a slowing and braking as if the bus had stopped to let someone off. She didn't permit it to concern her. If she dozed past her stop, the driver would wake her up

when they reached the city terminal and she'd take a cab home.

Something snapped her awake, but it took her a few seconds to realize what it was. The bus had stopped. Not just to discharge a passenger, it had stopped completely, the engine silent, the heat dying. She stirred, blinked awake, looked around her. Every other seat in the bus was empty.

But they were not in the terminal. The windows showed densely wooded countryside, distant mountains under a cold, dirty-gray sky. Had there been an accident; a blowout? Then she saw the redhead driver sauntering up the center aisle, moving like a dream figure, his hands deep in the pockets of his blue uniform jacket.

"Everybody else happened to get off this side of the city," he told her politely. His voice seemed strangely contented, his eyes mild and peaceful, almost cowlike. "We're all alone in the middle of nowhere, and I'm not due at the terminal for another hour. You're the last passenger, ma'am."

He took a small bottle out of his pocket and looked down at it sadly as if it reminded him of someone lost. By the amber bud of light from the overhead lamp she could barely make out the words in flowing script on the label. Two short French words.

Then the driver replaced the glass vial in his pocket and reached for her throat. •

JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS

by Edward D. Hoch

The Girl Was Young and Pretty, but She'd Have to Die.
After All, She Knew What They'd Done to Her Boyfriend.
Besides, There Was the Sixty-Six Thousand Dollars ...

FROM A PASSING CAR on the state highway, Garry Rich's place looked exactly like a drive-in movie. If motorists ever wondered why so many cars were neatly lined up before the great blank screen at high noon, few of them ever took the time to stop and inquire.

For Garry himself the abandoned drive-in theater proved to be the perfect location for his junk shop and auto graveyard.

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Even the town fathers had little objection to its neat appearance, and with the passing years people rarely bothered Garry Rich and the old friends who came to see him.

Once, driving out from the city, Johnny Blue brought along a great coil of green neon in the shape of a shamrock, retrieved from some dismantled saloon. Garry hung it with pride in the front window of his junk shop, reminding anyone who asked that his mother had

come over on the boat from Cork, even if his father had been a no-good bum.

Johnny Blue was a taxi driver in the city now, and on his Wednesdays off he usually drove the thirty miles out to Garry's place just to sit around and chat about old times. He was past fifty, and he had only two interests in life—the old times, and parts for his six-year-old taxi. "Garry, boy," he was asking this day, "did you get in anything good since last week? I could sure use a double-barrel carburetor in fair condition."

Garry nodded and slid off the chair. "Let's go look. I got in a nice convertible just yesterday. Smashed up on the highway."

"Front end?"

Garry shook his head. "Rear end. Stopped sudden and got rammed by a truckload of pumpkins. Come on, I'll show you."

They wandered down the lines of cars, passing wrecks with deflated tires and smashed windshields that stood in line waiting for scavengers like Johnny Blue. "What are you going to do when this place gets filled up, Garry?" he asked. "It's nearly full now."

"I don't know. Pile them on top of each other, I suppose." He thought about it more seriously and added, "Sam thinks I should buy one of them big incinerators or a press. But they cost too much, and besides I sell a lot of spare parts to people. Radios, even tires

sometimes. Here's the convertible I mentioned. Look—front tires like new!"

They'd stopped at the end of one long row, before a battered white hulk that had been a high-priced convertible just the day before. The front end seemed undamaged, as Garry had said, but the rear was mashed almost beyond repair.

"Anybody hurt?" Johnny Blue asked, whistling softly through his teeth.

"The girl who was driving. They took her to the hospital. Guy that was with her sold me the heap on the spot, and I towed it in here." He lifted the car's hood. "There's a carburetor for you, if it'll fit your taxi."

"How much?"

"I got the whole car for a hundred bucks. Give me ten and the carb is yours."

"Pumpkins, huh?"

"What?"

"You said the truck was loaded with pumpkins."

Garry nodded. "A real mess." He glanced back up the hill toward the junk shop and saw that someone was standing there. It was a girl in a black raincoat, one of the shiny kind that reflected the October sun. "Look it over, Johnny, while I check this customer."

"You never get customers on a Wednesday afternoon."

"Maybe business is picking up. I'll be back."

Before he reached the girl he saw the wide bandage on her forehead and the purple bruise around her left eye. "Hello," he greeted her. "You're the one from the accident yesterday."

She gave the slightest of nods, unwilling to move her bandaged head more than necessary. "I'm the one. I thought this was the place. I remembered the neon shamrock just before that idiot plowed into me."

She was younger than he'd remembered, and without the bandages and bruises he thought she'd be pretty. Her hair was the color of straw and her blue eyes were deep and cool. "Glad you're out of the hospital," he said. "That was a bad crash."

"I came about the car," she told him, her eyes already scanning the lines of wrecks in the lot below. "The insurance people say he shouldn't have sold it to you, not until they looked at it."

"I was just about to sell the carburetor out of it," he admitted. "But I can wait till your insurance man sees it."

"You don't understand," she said. "I need to buy the car back. How much did you give him for it?"

"A hundred dollars, but then there was the towing..."

"If I give you a hundred and twenty-five, will that cover it?"

"The car won't run, lady. Not with that rear end."

She thought about that. "Take

me down to see it."

"All right." He started back down the hill. "Watch your step. Here—take my hand."

When they reached the wreck at the end of the row, Johnny Blue had his head under the hood, inspecting the distributor. The girl ignored him and went instead to the back, running her fingers over the twisted, crumpled metal of the trunk lid. "Could you get this open?" she asked Garry.

"Not without a torch, lady. That thing's sealed like a bank vault."

"All right," she agreed finally. "Keep the car overnight and I'll be back tomorrow."

After she'd gone, Garry said, "She's a strange one, all right."

"Can I have the carburetor?" Johnny Blue asked.

"I guess not until tomorrow, Johnny. If she doesn't buy the heap back, it's yours."

On the way up the hill, Johnny Blue asked, "Ever think of showing movies here, Garry?"

"Huh?"

"The people could come on foot and sit in the cars. The screen's already there."

"I never thought about it, Johnny."

They went into the junk shop then and sat for a long time talking about the old days.

MUCH OF GARRY'S TIME was devoted to talking about the old days, and the men who came to

see him at the junk shop were most likely to be friends from the past he remembered so clearly. Though Garry Rich was only fifty-one, his body had been betrayed into premature aging. Ten years behind prison bars had taken their toll of Garry, and of many of his friends. They were too old for the rackets now, too old for much of anything except sitting around the junk shop and recalling the past.

Sam Teage, when he came out, liked to remind Garry of the time they stole embalming fluid from the neighborhood funeral parlor because someone told them it added an extra kick to marijuana. That night, sitting with Garry in the junk shop, he was more mellow than usual. Sam had only one arm. He'd lost the other fleeing from railway cops in a freight yard after an abortive hijacking.

"You used to be different, Garry," he said, "when you were back in the city." He rubbed the stump of his arm and took out his chewing tobacco.

"That was back in the city." Garry could hear the loons over the nearby lake, screeching and hooting at the rising moon. "Hear them?" he asked Sam. "Hear them singing their crazy song?"

"I hear them. Why do you stay in this lonely place, Garry?"

"People come. You come, Sam. And Johnny Blue drives his taxi out on Wednesday afternoons. I even have customers sometimes. I

guess this is the life I always promised myself after all those years behind bars." Then he told Sam about the accident, and about the girl who'd come back that very afternoon in search of her damaged car.

Sam merely shook his head. "All you smell in this place is the stink of rusting metal and the exhaust fumes from the highway."

"It's still better than the city. Hell, Sam, I'd get mugged in the subway by some twelve-year-old kid. Or else I'd be doing the mugging. And I'm too old for either one."

They heard a noise from outside, and for an instant the green glow of the neon shamrock fell across a youngish, intent face. Then the door opened and he was inside. "I came for my car," he said, shifting his gaze from Garry to Sam and back again.

"What car?" Garry asked, though he remembered the man.

"The one I sold you yesterday. I know this is the place. I remember the shamrock. And I remember you."

"I can't sell you back the car. Your girl wants to buy it."

"The car was mine. I sold it to you and I want it back. Tonight!"

"You can't drive it. The rear end's all smashed in."

He was older than the girl by some years, and there was a hardness about his eyes that Garry knew too well. Twenty years ago

he'd seen it every time he looked in a mirror. Garry tried to move, but the younger man was too fast for him. His hand came suddenly into view holding a small foreign automatic pointed at Garry's stomach. "Take me down there," he ordered. "No funny business."

"You don't need the gun."

"I need it. Take a flashlight and lead the way."

Garry sighed and picked up a light. "Stay here, Sam. I'll be back."

"He goes too," the man said, motioning with the gun. "He can still dial a telephone with one arm."

By night the hulks of deserted automobiles seemed like so many gravestones lying beneath the moon. They might have been planted there before the vast white movie screen that was no longer used. Garry led the way along the familiar route, not really needing the flashlight he waved in circles before them.

He waited until a curtain of cloud blotted the glow of the moon, then tossed the flashlight off to one side and shoved Sam Teage in the other direction. "Down, Sam!"

The man behind them cursed and fired a quick shot at the tumbling flashlight. By the time he'd swung around for a second shot, Garry and Sam were safe behind one of the rusting hulks. "Who the hell is that guy?" Sam whispered hoarsely.

"Stay down. Whoever he is, he's serious."

The gun roared once more, and somewhere behind them a windshield cracked under the bullet's impact. At Garry's side, Sam drew a deep breath. "I'll take that guy. Give me a minute, then make a noise over to the left."

"Sam..." Garry started to protest, but the one-armed man had already slipped away in the darkness. He counted out a minute and then threw a loose piece of metal off to the left. It hit with a clatter that brought another shot from the gunman. Almost immediately there was a groan and the thud of a falling body.

"All right," Sam called out, standing up. "I got him."

Garry walked over and picked up the flashlight. He let the beam fall on the sprawled body, on the knife wound oozing blood from beneath the left armpit. "You didn't have to kill him, Sam."

"It was him or us. Who was he?"

Garry drew a deep breath. Sam was still the expert with a knife, even with only one arm. Still the expert, and still the killer. "I bought a car from him yesterday after an accident." He tried to remember the name on the bill of sale. "Charles something. Charles Oates, I think his name was." He told Sam about the girl's visit that afternoon.

"What do you make of it?" Sam asked when he'd finished.

"They want the car back for something. Let's bury this guy and see if we can get a look inside that trunk."

"How?"

"I'll call Johnny Blue and have him rent some equipment for us. An acetylene torch and goggles. I've got some crowbars here."

"You're going to cut into the trunk?"

"Hell, it's my car now."

"Can't you get in through the back seat?"

Garry shook his head. "There's a panel blocking it, and the spare tire's up there too. We need a torch."

"What do you think's in there, Garry?"

"I don't know. Something the girl put there and Oates didn't know about till it was too late. We'll see."

"You think the girl will come looking for him?"

"Maybe." Garry went up to the office and turned out the neon shamrock. Then he picked up a shovel and went back down the hill to where Sam waited with the body.

JOHNNY BLUE TOOK OFF from work the next day and drove his taxi over to Garry's place. In the trunk he had the equipment they'd asked for, and by noon they were down at the white convertible, ready for business.

"It's like the old days, cutting open a safe," Johnny said.

"Sure is," Sam agreed.

"You really killed the guy?"

"He's buried right back there, by the screen." Sam got out his chewing tobacco.

Sunlight glinted off the lines of rusting cars and the highway was busy with the usual midday traffic. Garry kept watching it, and he wasn't disappointed. Johnny had just lit the torch when the girl arrived, parking in front of the junk shop.

"Hello there," Garry said, walking up the hill to intercept her.

"I came back about the car."

"Your friend was here last night."

"My friend?"

"Charles Oates. He took it. Towed it away."

She went white and he thought she might topple over. But then she spotted the glow of Johnny's torch and recognized the car. "There it is! What are those men doing to it?"

"Just opening the trunk, that's all."

"No!" She broke into a run. "They can't do that!"

"It's my car, lady."

Garry caught her and held her twisting in his arms while Johnny Blue went to work with his torch. It took him fifteen minutes to open the thing. Years ago, Garry had seen him cut through a safe door in half the time.

There was only one thing in the trunk when they got it open—a

blue canvas airline bag full of banded packs of currency. Sam was smiling as he counted through it with his good arm.

"How much is there?" Garry asked the girl.

"Sixty-six thousand."

"From where?"

She didn't answer. Johnny Blue got to his feet, slowly, with a glint in his eyes Garry hadn't seen in years. He slapped the girl across the face. "He asked you a question."

"A bank," she gasped. "In a shopping center near the city."

"She's telling the truth," Johnny said, holding up a money band with the bank's name on it.

"I was supposed to put the money in a locker at the airport and I didn't," the girl continued. "It was in the trunk and Charles didn't know it. After the accident he got scared and sold the car. He was so angry when I told him about the money."

"You don't have to worry about him now. He's gone," Garry said.

Her eyes darted from one face to another. "The car he rented is parked down the road."

Garry cursed silently. He'd looked for a car the night before, but missed it in the darkness. "Sam gave him a ride to where he was going."

"I sure did," Sam confirmed. "Just like the old days." He rubbed the stump of his missing arm.

"You killed him, didn't you?"

the girl asked.

"Let's get rid of her too," Sam said. "Once a few cars are on top of the graves, nobody'll ever find them."

The girl began to sob softly, and Sam almost hit her again. "Wait a minute," Garry said, grabbing his arm. "Let's think about this."

"We can't keep the money and let her go! If she's picked up she'll tell the cops we killed Oates."

"She doesn't know our names," Garry argued. "And we don't know hers."

But Johnny Blue shook his head. "She knows that shamrock in your window, Garry. She knows the place."

"My name is Joyce Ferrell," the girl said, defiant now. "Kill me and get it over with."

Sam took out the gun then, the one Oates had carried. "The place is an auto graveyard already, Garry. We might as well make it a real one. Maybe you could do a business in burials on the side."

Garry took the bag of money and weighed it thoughtfully in his hand. He hadn't asked for it to come like this, on a highway a long way from nowhere. He hadn't asked to be reminded of the past, or the days that used to be. "What do you say, Johnny?"

"If we keep the money we gotta kill her, Garry. Even if we don't keep the money, she knows what

happened to her boyfriend."

"Yeah."

"They're just a couple of bank robbers. What the hell—I killed a cop once a long time ago."

"That's just it—a long time ago. Last night was self-defense. This would be murder." Garry tossed the bag of money to the girl. "Take it and get out."

"Garry!"

"It's not the old days, Sam, even though it seemed like it last night. The old days are gone."

Sam Teage lowered the gun reluctantly. "You sure have changed, Garry."

"We all have."

He walked up the hill with the girl and headed toward her parked car. She turned to thank him, and he had an urge to slide in there

beside her and take off for Mexico with that sixty-six thousand dollars. But he'd changed, just like Sam said.

"Come on, you two," he said when he got back to Johnny and Sam. "I got some beer on ice."

"All that money," Johnny muttered as he accepted a beer.

"Money comes and goes." Garry settled down in his favorite chair. Then he saw that the shamrock wasn't lit and got up to turn it on. "Maybe I should start showing movies," he said.

Halfway through his second beer Sam started to relax. "Remember once down in the city," he began, "before I lost my arm? It was the night we mugged that guy in the subway and..." ●

SOME OF THE GREATEST NAMES IN THE MYSTERY GENRE

William L. Fieldhouse
Joe R. Lansdale
James Reasoner
Stephen Mertz
Richard Laymon
Jean Darling

Edward D. Hoch
Jack Ritchie
John Ball
William F. Nolan
Gary Brandner
Jon L. Breen

will be appearing in future issues
of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE.
DON'T MISS AN EXCITING ISSUE!

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

by Jon L. Breen

Times Changed, so Organized Crime Had to Change. Eddie the Gat Was Willing to Cooperate, But Some of These New Ideas Bothered Him!

EDDIE THE GAT had been with the Mob for a long time, far longer than most. He always thought he had lasted because he could cope with change, unlike a lot of guys who still had one foot stuck back in Prohibition. Times changed and the methods and practices of all big businesses changed and evolved as the years passed. Organized crime had to change, too. It stood to reason, though some didn't buy it.

Yeah, Eddie the Gat was flexible and cooperative as hell. But this latest instruction from the Boss had just about thrown him. Some in the Mob, Eddie the Gat

among them, were seriously wondering about the Boss and whether he needed to be replaced. But for the moment at least, the Boss was still the Boss and, following instructions as always, Eddie found himself forty stories above the ground in a downtown office building, sitting across a neat, shiny desk from a snappily dressed but barely unpimpled kid who could have been his son.

"The Boss says I got to talk to you about — uh — hiring somebody to — uh ..."

"It's all right," said the kid, "I know. You want to employ a qualified individual to eliminate a

certain individual who has made his or her continued existence undesirable to the Mob.”

“Uh, yeah, right. But why do I have to see you, kid? I never had to before. I don’t mean no disrespect ...”

“Certainly not. I understand.”

“... but I just was wondering. What the hell is an Affirmative Action Officer anyway?”

“Well, Eddie, my purpose is not to hinder your operation in any way. I am simply charged with making sure proper personnel practices are followed in the selection of your ... what is the term applied to the position to be filled?”

“I guess, hitman.”

“No, better make it hitperson. Or better yet, assassin. It avoids one of those ‘person’ words that always sound rather silly to me, don’t they to you? Chairperson, foreperson, things like that?”

“Yeah, that sounds kind of silly, but assassin sounds kind of fancy. I mean, we ain’t gonna hit the President or nothin’. And anyway, why does it matter what we call it?”

“For the job announcement.”

“Yeah, well, you see, we never did it like that before. I mean, we were never so formal about it. Is this job announcement supposed to be in writing?”

“That is customary, yes.”

“Well how can you advertise for a hitman — I mean, an assassin — in writing? It sort of spoils the

element of surprise, don’t it, if you send out an announcement that you’re gonna bump a guy off?”

“How have you normally announced job openings in the past?”

“Well, it’s been kind of word of mouth, you know? You sort of just let the word get around.”

“I suppose that is advisable. Just so you make sure the announcement is made widely enough to attract the widest possible applicant pool without, of course, warning the potential victim or incurring the displeasure of law enforcement agencies.”

“Uh, yeah. Whaddaya mean about the widest possible applicant pool?”

“To give a chance for all qualified candidates to apply. In the past, minorities and women have been sadly under-represented in many job classifications both within and outside the Mob. Are you aware of that?”

“Hey, we’ve always had women around.”

“As secretaries and gun molls and camp followers, certainly, but not in positions of authority or responsibility. Have you ever seen a woman division chief in the Mob?”

“Well, no ...”

“And as for minorities, most organized criminal organizations have confined their employees to members of a particular ethnic group — such as Italians, Irish, Jews, Blacks, or in the case of the

present Mob ...”

“We stick to people we can trust. If we spread the word about this hit far and wide, like you say, won’t an awful lot of people know about our plans? We don’t want the whole world to know who we’re gonna knock over.”

“You don’t have to say *whom* you are planning to have killed.”

“What do we do when police stoolies get the word? They will, you know, this way.”

“Rumor is rumor. We deny it, that’s all. And after all, the job only has to stay open two weeks.”

“Two weeks? We want to hit the guy sooner than that!”

“No, I’m sorry, two weeks is the absolute minimum. Then we’ll have to appoint a screening committee to go through the applications and arrange interviews.”

“Hey, how long is *that* gonna take?”

“Once we get a procedure established, the screening, interviewing and hiring process shouldn’t take long, Eddie.”

“Are you telling me I have to hire a person just because he’s black or he’s a Mexican or he’s a woman?”

“Certainly not. To do that would be to miss the whole point of affirmative action. You pick the most qualified candidate who applies, regardless of race, sex, or age. The purpose of affirmative action is to assure the widest possible applicant pool in order to give women and minority

candidates the opportunity to apply and compete for the position. That is all.”

“Oh.” Eddie the Gat was silent for a moment. A voice in his head was telling him to move with the times, but the voice in his mouth said, “Is this really necessary, kid? I mean, who’s gonna check up on us?”

“You never know, Eddie. But I for one would hate to see the Mob we’ve all worked so hard to build cited for unfair labor practices. And I would ask you this: do we abrogate our responsibility as good citizens simply because our business is crime?”

The kid walked to the window, raised it, and looked out at the crowded streets below.

“Look at that city, Eddie! The Mob has attained a position of importance, influence, and, yes, respect in this community. It has an obligation to protect its position and use it for good ends.”

Eddie walked to the window and looked out, too. “Yeah, yeah, I can see that.”

“I think the respect accorded us can grow only if people are aware that the Mob is an equal opportunity employer.”

“How are people gonna apply for this job? I mean, we can’t have a lot in writing.”

“Give them a phone number they can call and give us their qualifications, suitably coded of course. At the same time, they can

leave word where we can reach them if the screening committee selects them for interview."

"Sounds okay, I guess." Eddie thought a moment more. Then his eyes lit up suddenly. "Hey, kid, how'd you get this job anyway?"

The kid looked slightly embarrassed. "Well, actually, the Boss is my uncle. But that was the wrong way to do things, Eddie, and my goal is to make sure no employee of the Mob is hired for reasons like that ever again."

"Still, it don't seem right," Eddie mumbled, under his breath.

The intercom line on the kid's telephone buzzed, and he walked to the desk to pick it up.

"It's for you," he said, handing the phone to Eddie.

"Yeah?"

"Eddie, this is Moe. We done the job on the Boss."

"Yeah?"

"It was time, Eddie. We couldn't wait no longer. We need new leadership. All the boys want you to take over, Eddie."

"Yeah?" Eddie saw that the kid had returned to the window and was looking out at the city. "Will you hold on a second, Moe?"

Eddie the Gat walked to the window, said in a soft and sincere voice, "Sorry, kid," and sent him forty stories with one good push. Then he returned to the phone.

"Moe, the first thing we gotta do is pick a new Affirmative Action Officer. And I want you to be on the screening committee."

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

(continued from Page 4)

Another name new to MSMM but not to the mystery field is JON BREEN. Our request for biographical information drew the following response: *Jon L. Breen is thirty-five years old, and though born in Alabama, has lived in Southern California most of his life. He is a full-time librarian at Rio Hondo College, Whittier and a reviewer for the Wilson Library Bulletin and Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. During an Army stint (1967-1969) Breen was trained as a medic, a job for which he had no aptitude. In 1979 he married Rita Gunson, whom he met while on a cruise in the Norwegian fjords the previous year. Breen enjoys movies (the older the better), theater, spectator sports (especially baseball and horse racing, neither of which he bets on), and all types of mystery and detective fiction. He is a gourmet cook, having successfully made split pea soup twice in the past summer, and a noted naturalist. He likes to observe animals (especially spiders and hummingbirds) and plants (he doesn't know their names but then neither do they.)*

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

by Rex and Elizabeth Levie

They Stole Ricco's Wife and Demanded One Million Dollars for Her Safe Return. If Ricco Didn't Cooperate, They'd Send Her Back A Piece at a Time!

"MR. SOLEIL?"

The voice is young, insolent, with an exaggerated Midwest twang. His first reaction is annoyance that he has been called by his wife's stage name: that someone has this number which is supposed to be secret.

"Umberto," he corrects.

"You're married to Susan Soleil, the movie star, aren't you?" Something in the voice alerts him, and he reaches for the buzzer on the desk. "We've got her."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

The man who enters in response to the buzzer is tall and tanned.

A tennis pro, if tennis pros had such cold, lifeless eyes. Ricco Umberto motions to him, and he picks up the extension at the bar, cradling the mouthpiece in his hand.

"Your wife. We got her. You want her back? One million bucks. No cops."

"And if I tell you to go screw yourself?"

"Then I guess we just have to send you something to convince you. How about her left titty? You want me to give you one of them nice, juicy boobs of hers to play with while she's gone? One million. Start getting it up. We'll tell you where and when."

"Listen, punk — "

There is a click at the far end of the line, and the phone buzzes at him angrily. Silently, he returns it to the cradle. At the bar, Lupo does the same. Their eyes meet, but he cannot tell what the other is thinking behind his pale green eyes.

"You heard. Find them."

"Of course." Lupo turns, then stops at the door. For the first time there is a flicker of life behind the dull pupils. "And when I find them, Don Ricco?"

"Just find them."

As the door closes he spins in his chair to face the wall where Susan's portrait hangs. How dare they do this to him. Punks! They are, of course, outsiders; unless . . . No, he decides. The Council would use other means.

The telephone on the desk rings again. It is, as he expects, the studio. Mark is in a state of panic.

"Rick, baby. Listen, something happened to Suzie — "

"Did anyone see the punks who snatched her?"

"You know then."

"They just called. Did anyone see them?"

"No. It happened outside the main gate. Look, I'm going out of my mind. We've got fifteen million tied up in this picture. Without Suzie, it's shit. Listen, we'll give them anything they want. The studio will be behind you . . . "

"They want a million dollars."

There is a long silence.

"Are you going to pay?" he asks at last.

"No." He owes Mark no explanations.

"Rick, baby . . . Look, what if the studio puts up half?"

"No. This is my problem."

"Sure, sure. But if anything happens to her . . . I'll call the cops, okay? We'll get the FBI on it."

"No cops. I'll handle it my way."

Again there is a pause. Mark knows enough. He does not dare interfere.

"Okay, baby — no offense. Just remember, we're talking about the most beautiful woman in the world . . . "

"No." His voice is the flat, sharp crack of a whip. "We're talking about my wife."

HIS EYES RETURN to the portrait. It shows her in one of her favorite roles. He remembers their first meeting, during one of Frank's parties at the Springs. He is delighted to find that despite the fancy French name the young starlet is a good Italian girl. They talk, and find enough relatives and friends in common that he asks if he may take her home after the party. Not yet the most beautiful woman in the world, she accepts.

His first intention is to make her his mistress. He offers her wealth, vitality, influence: the

most important things in her life. In return, she offers beauty: an angel's face, a flawless, larger than life body. Behind the dumb-blonde facade, he finds a bright, witty, shrewd mind. With success in his grasp, he suddenly changes tactics and proposes.

Below the portrait are their wedding pictures. An odd mixture of show business greats and rarely photographed friends. He remembers the toast Frank offers at the reception: "To Soleil and Umberto; Sunshine and Shadow." But already she has made her first big film. Already she is becoming the most beautiful woman.

"RICK, WE CAN'T have children now." By the second year of marriage, it is a constant argument. "It'll wreck my career. I want a family too, but we have to wait until I'm established."

"What about Loren?" he replies. "Did it wreck her career?"

"That was different. She was already at the top. Right now, all I've got going for me is the sex-symbol thing. A baby would ruin everything. I have to make them see me as an actress — make them give me some serious scripts. You know how much it means to me. Is that too much to ask, just a few years?"

And because he loves her too much to resent her career, he waits. He uses his influence — and the Syndicate's money — to

buy parts for her. Her career flourishes. But the arguments become more bitter. He demands that she fulfill her role as wife. She replies that she will not waste these few years at the top.

As she nears thirty, she becomes obsessed with her body. More and more she devotes herself to diets, beauty treatments, massage. To his disgust and dismay Ricco finds himself increasingly barred from his wife's bed.

He considers divorce, then rejects it. He cannot bear the thought of being without her. The vision of another possessing her sends him into insane rages. But Lupo's continuous surveillance of Susan's activities assures him that his only rival is her own obsession.

He decides to go along with her, meeting his needs elsewhere. But no one will take him seriously. It is summed up with stark clarity when he is reduced to making a pass at their young housemaid. She looks at him uncertainly for a moment, then giggles: "Gee, Mr. Umberto, quit your kidding! For a minute I thought you meant it. I mean, what would you want with me? You must be the luckiest guy in the world, married to Miss Soleil and all . . ."

It is an impossible situation. And now she has been kidnapped.

IT IS NEARLY EIGHT before Lupo returns. He finds Ricco still

staring at the wall in his darkened office.

"There were two of them, Don Ricco. A white and a black. The man I had covering her is in the hospital: they forced the car off the road just as it got to the studio. I have the street people looking but we haven't found anything."

"They'll call back soon. Can we trace the call?"

"We can try, but . . . " In the gloom Lupo's face is an oval blur. "Are you going to pay?"

"No. Offer a thousand to anyone who fingers them. Have someone cover the house. They might come here."

"Perhaps. They're not professionals — only kids, from the description. There's no way to tell what they'll do."

"I know." He is glad the darkness hides his own expression. "When you find them, tell me first. Understand?"

"Yes." Lupo withdraws, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

THEIR LAST ARGUMENT is the night before the kidnapping. He sits in the large, overstuffed chair in their bedroom watching as she prepares for bed.

Ignoring him, she strips in front of the mirror, critically examining each of her large, firm breasts before massaging them with the latest of a string of miracle creams. He watches her in the flesh and in the mirror as the taut,

proud nipples swell and a look of bemused pleasure crosses her face.

It is torture. When he can stand it no more, he tosses aside his book and crosses behind her, kissing her neck and sliding his hands over hers on the warm, greasy skin of her breasts.

"Ricco, don't — you'll leave marks!" She pulls away, thrusting his hands aside.

"What if I do? What difference does it make?"

"They'll show. You know I have a nude scene coming up tomorrow."

"I told you to cancel that scene."

"You know I can't. Mark says it's critical to the script: the whole story revolves around it."

"Then have them fake it."

"Why bother? Everyone will think it's me anyway."

"I don't like the idea of all those bums at the studio watching you parade around."

"Oh, for Christ's sake — don't start that again. I told you, it's completely impersonal. They're pros — it's like going to the doctor."

"Cancel the scene."

"No. Why should I?"

"So I can make love to you, for starters. What the hell do you think I am, some kind of eunuch? I'm married to you. I get turned on watching you parade like that."

"And what do you want me to be: a fat Italian mamma dragging

a dozen kids around and with another one in the basket? Mark's done a lot for my career. If he thinks the scene is important, I'm going to do it. You don't have any right to tell me not to."

"The hell I don't. I'm your husband."

"Then act like one, not like some jealous wop loverboy." He raises his hand to slap her. "That's right, go ahead — beat me up. Show me what a great lover you are."

He drops his hand, rigid with anger, and stalks out of the room. Mark is at a party when he reaches him, his voice thick and drunken as he shouts over the babble of voices.

"Rick, baby. Good to hear from you — not now, sweetheart. I'm on the phone — something the matter?"

"Susan tells me you're going ahead with the nude scene tomorrow. I thought I told you to drop it."

"Rick, baby! You know how it is. We've got a lot of money tied up in this script. That scene is going to *make* the property. I can't cut it now." Behind him, someone giggles, cut off as he muffles the phone.

"What if I tell you I'm withdrawing my money from the picture?"

"Hey, come on ... you wouldn't do that."

"I want that scene cut."

"Okay, if you want out, I guess

I can find someone to buy your percentage. Can you give me a few days?" He thinks he is being clever.

"Mark, you don't understand." His voice is soft; dangerous. "I said: I won't let Susan do that scene. Maybe I should send Mr. Lupo over to discuss it with you. He'd like that."

"Rick . . ." Mark's voice loses some of its drunken gaiety. "I'm not kidding: that scene is important. Without it, we have to rewrite the whole ending."

"Cut it."

"What if we use a double?"

"Cut it."

"Rick . . . All right, if it's that important to you. I'll get the writers on it in the morning. I'm sure we can work something out."

"I'm sure you can, too. I knew you'd see it my way. Good night, Mark."

It is a hollow victory, without satisfaction. It will only mean one more fight with Susan.

"MR. SOL . . . excuse me, Umberto." It is the same voice, dripping sarcasm. "You have the money?"

"Listen, punk. Do you know who I am?"

"Sure, sure. Little Suzie told us all about it. If you're such a big man, you won't have any trouble raising the bread, now, will you?" He obviously does not believe, or worse, does not realize what it means.

"I'll tell you what I will give you, punk. One hour to get her back here, safe."

"I'm afraid we just can't do that, Mr. Umberto. I mean, we got all our plans made for spending that money. You sure don't want us to be disappointed now, do you? Tell you what I'll do, though. Since I can't send all of her back, I'll send along that souvenir I promised. Only you better hurry up with the money: be a shame if there wasn't much left of her to give back."

The phone goes dead. A moment later Lupo pushes open the door.

"Could you trace it?"

"No." Lupo shakes his head.

"Okay. They'll be coming here tonight. Let me know as soon as you spot them."

"Do we stop him here?"

"No — we follow him back. I don't want any screwups."

For the first time since the kidnapping Ricco smiles. A tired, wan smile. It is only a small gamble: they will not dare harm her much, not until they have the money. His foot touches the suitcase crammed with bills before he makes his final decision. But it is going to work. Everything will be just fine.

IT IS CHILD'S PLAY to follow the punk after he delivers the package. Ricco sits in the back of the car, staring into the small white

box. Inside, nestled in bloody cotton, is a single, perfect nipple.

"Don Ricco?" There is a rap at the window, and Lupo appears from the night. "The back house. They're both inside. Mrs. Umberto is alone in the bedroom. I have a man covering her from the window. She looks okay."

"Anyone in the front house?"

"No. We checked it out." Lupo holds the door for him as he leaves the car.

"Get rid of this." He hands Lupo the box.

The neighborhood is dark and quiet. The houses are cheap, run down. There is trash at the curb, and he notices two broken windows on the front house. From somewhere comes the raucous blare of a radio and the sound of a baby screaming angrily. There is no one on the street.

The two punks are sitting at the kitchen table drinking beer and playing cards. They look up as the door crashes open, and the white reaches for a gun on the table. Lupo calmly takes aim and shoots him twice in the stomach, then steps over and kicks the gun away.

"Up against the wall." He motions the black away from the table. One of the men frisks him expertly. "Don Ricco?"

"They're yours." Ricco's face is impassive.

"Gratzia." Lupo smiles suddenly, a thing he rarely does.

Ricco notices that the pale green eyes are filled with darting flicks of red fire: like a shark's when it is about to strike.

The white is still writhing on the floor, clutching his belly. Lupo brings out a knife. As it snaps open, the black's head comes around. He watches in slack-jawed horror as Lupo kneels over his friend. Only when it is finished, and Lupo comes over to pull his trousers down, does the boy move. Lupo's soldiers hold him as he struggles, bright blood spurting across the floor. Lupo has to break his jaw to get his mouth open. Then the punk is clawing at his throat, choking on his own manhood. Lupo watches, still smiling, until the thrashing stops.

IN THE BEDROOM, Ricco sits beside his wife. Her face is bruised. On the left breast of her expensive jacket is a dark stain.

"Oh, Ricco, do you know what they did to me?" She clings to him desperately. He puts his arms around her and kisses her. "How can you still want me?"

"How can I not want you? You are my wife. I love you." He tilts her head up, making her see in his eyes that it is true. "Would I want you less if you had surgery?"

"Oh, Ricco . . ." She buries her head on his shoulder and weeps.

They are walking through the shabby living room; Ricco half carrying her. She glances at the closed kitchen door.

"What about them?"

"I gave them to Lupo."

Her eyes widen slightly, then glint like blue ice.

"Good."

HALFWAY HOME, she remembers.

"Ricco, the studio! My God, I can't go there like this."

"Don't worry about it. I talked to Mark. They'll hold up shooting until you're better. The nude scene is out. He's rewriting the script."

"But if the papers get the story . . ."

"Don't worry, they won't. We're getting the best doctor in Beverly Hills. He says give him a couple of months, and no one will ever be able to tell. He can do it in his office — you don't even have to go to a hospital."

"I guess I just don't know how lucky I am, to be married to a man who thinks of everything." She cuddles against him. No longer Susan Soleil, the most beautiful woman in the world. Just Mrs. Umberto.

"See, that's what I've been trying to tell you." He grins and pulls his coat closer around her.

Everything is working out as planned. It has been a small price to pay: he has won his gamble. And later, when the plastic surgery is finished and she feels more like a whole woman, they will discuss children. Lots of children. •

THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THING

by Susan Szafranski

He Admitted Killing the Science Teacher, but Somebody Else Beat Him to Miss Turner. There Were Two Victims and Two Murderers. But Why Bother with Two Killers When Catching One Would Do Just As Well?

DEAR LIEUTENANT,

I have been following your investigation into the murders of the two teachers quite closely. The papers are now speculating that you may even be close to solving them. After reading this and also after being questioned quite extensively about my possible involvement in this matter, I knew I must write you. And to you personally, sir, for it's only recently come to my attention that your daughter attends the

school where the murders occurred. This, coupled with the fact of your heading the investigation, has brought me to realize that your stake in this matter is not only professional but also personal as well. So I assure you of complete honesty in what I write.

I don't wish to declare my innocence. I admit to you and only you that I did indeed terminate the science teacher Mr. Abrahams. And I'll admit that I would have also killed Miss Turner, had some-

one not beaten me to it. Ah, but you see, Lieutenant, the point is someone else did. For both our sakes I suggest you call off your men. Have them wag their fingers in someone else's direction.

May I say Mr. J. Caulkins, the Math teacher, would be a very good candidate for them to talk to.

Not only was he at the school at the time of the murders, but also he was Miss Turner's lover. Or should I say one of them.

You see Miss Turner's lifestyle, as it were, was at the heart of all my troubles. She would cause many of the faculty and young high school students to have palpitations of the heart as she walked through the halls wearing her painted-on jeans and blouses unbuttoned almost to her waist.

Many times I tactfully suggested she should dress more conservatively, but to no avail. When finally I firmly told her that her revealing outfits were not good examples for our impressionable students, she just laughed at me, and tossing her long hair back over her shoulder, she called me archaic. "You should have been put out with Coolidge," she taunted. "What this school needs is a progressive and modern principal, not one still stuck in the dark ages. I'll see to it you're replaced, even if it takes everything I have."

Thus, the wheel of trouble began to turn. First, she recruited

Mr. Abrahams, into her plan by using, as she said she would, everything she had.

Being one of these so-called modern teachers, she'd have her students listen to records. Then she would have them explain to each other what the lyrics meant to them. "Expressing themselves," she called it.

Meanwhile, she and Mr. Abrahams would be in the teacher's lounge, uh-hum, expressing themselves. A situation I felt wise to overlook temporarily. If I brought charges against them, Miss Turner and her wiles could just possibly get them dismissed. Then she'd be free with more vengeance to ruin me.

Abrahams I believe was not very modern. I'm sure that Miss Turner's only interest in him was his stature and respectability and his fifteen years service to the school. This would add more clout in her case to oust me from my position. Abrahams, poor Abrahams, with his hair thinning and his stomach doing just the opposite, probably felt he had finally found someone who saw his inner beauty. He started sporting a moustache that grew out in the wrong shade of red. Wearing his new polyester leisure suit with slight flairs, he would wait happily for Miss Turner to greet him before the first bell sounded. Abrahams, having what I called "biological blindness, was then dangerous to the security of my job

and also required elimination.

Joel Caulkins is the male version of the former Miss Turner, characteristically anyway. He was loud-mouthed, trouble-making and, also like her, modern. "You have to change with the times, man, you know . . .," he always said with a shake of his curled head. Change. What does he know about change? I doubt he ever changes the khaki shirt he always wears.

He was always looking over his tinted glasses and fondling his beard when I passed him in the halls. I felt he was waiting for my job.

The thought of them complaining to the school committee and possibly causing me to lose my job, was just too much to bear. I had to do something.

I chose that particular Friday because I guess you could say opportunity knocked loud and clear.

As usual on Fridays, students and faculty leave quickly in anticipation of the week-end. All except Miss Turner, Mr. Abrahams, and Mr. Caulkins, who, I suspect, were there to complete their final plans of my demise. The maintenance crew was occupied waxing the gym floor. I felt assured this stroke of luck could only mean that this was the day destined for just my purposes.

Abrahams was no trouble. He was sitting at his desk with his back towards me, when I came up

behind him with the hammer. I know he heard me coming, because his head crooked slightly. I suppose he thought I was Miss Turner coming to plant a kiss on his sparsely-haired head. I raised the hammer and, bringing it down hard and swift, I planted what he never would've imagined.

I was leaving the classroom when I heard voices. I broke out in a sweat. You know the kind, Lieutenant: first hot, then cold. I'd been discovered, I thought. I'd surely lose my job. Then I realized it wasn't voices. It was screaming; a kind of garbled scream at that.

My first inclination was that Mr. Caulkins and Miss Turner had been having a lovers' quarrel. I went closer to her room. Miss Turner was definitely screaming, or trying to. But the hands around her throat were just too strong, too powerful. Especially after the beating the hands must have just inflicted on her, judging from the looks of her red, pulpy face.

"You'll never touch him again, never!" the voice of the choker yelled. "You had enough boyfriends. I told you. I warned you to leave mine alone." Her grip tightened.

There weren't any more sounds from Miss Turner. Still, the girl kept choking. Satisfied she'd completed what she'd come to do, the girl kicked the modern Miss Turner before leaving.

Hiding by the lockers then, I could never have imagined how

important a part this girl would have in my future plans.

I felt elated; two down, one to go. Joel Caulkins could still go to the school committee.

When I turned towards the direction of his room, I caught a glimpse of him bounding down the hall. To meet his two conspirators I suspect. I took refuge once again behind the lockers. I would need the element of surprise in downing him, for he most assuredly had weight and strength on his side.

Unfortunately, he was closer to Mr. Abrahams' room than to me. When he saw what had taken place, he flew through the halls to the nearest exit, either in shock or fear.

So, I feared, went my job. It was a predicament I was very worried about. Needless to say, Mr. Caulkins' telling the men about my differences with the deceased brought no relief to my situation.

That is, until your men felt warranted to bring me directly to you for questioning.

There in your office, Lieutenant, is where the revelation came to me. I could not tell you at the time, for your men were present. And though you may think me a fool for writing, sort of sealing my own fate perhaps, I must say that my being apprehended was only a matter of time.

I know, too, the girl who killed Miss Turner will also have to be apprehended; and though my

argument is with Caulkins and not she, I realize the irrefutable proof I have of her part in the murders would be brought out at my trial. But then again . . .

I'm sorry, Lieutenant. I do tend to ramble. Back to my revelation. To solve my problem of Mr. Caulkins' running to the school board and to clear my name completely of any wrongdoing, I suggest you pick him up for the murders. After all, he and Miss Turner were romantically involved. I'd say that he discovered Miss Turner was having an affair with both himself and Mr. Abrahams. He probably felt he was being played for a fool, so did them both in.

That would solve my problem quite nicely; what school committee would ever listen to a murderer? And you, Lieutenant, would have your murderer, and your case would be closed.

I do hope you see it my way, Lieutenant. After all, you and your family seem so close and content, judging from the picture I saw on your desk. I'd hate to upset that serenity by embarrassing your daughter with the suggestion she join the school wrestling team — even though, with the strength and power she has in her hands she could probably win our school the championship.

Sincerely,
Malcolm Sweeny,
Principal

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STIFF COMPETITION

BOOK REVIEWS

by John Ball

HINDSIGHT ALWAYS being 20/20, we are constantly hearing about thoughtful souls who bought and saved all of the copies of *Black Mask* when they could be had for ten or fifteen cents each. That can't be done anymore, but there is something new that is sure to become a collector's dream within a few short years.

The Foul Play Press is issuing a series of six reprints of Phoebe Atwood Taylor mysteries which feature either her Cape Cod detective Asey Mayo or Leonidas Witherall, whose fate it is to be a double for one William Shakespeare, a crime writer whose two best murder dramas, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are quite well regarded.

These quality paperback reprints contain good stories that are welcome back in print, but now the plot thickens splendidly. On the six colorful covers as many murder victims are found, all foully done in. The mayhem is vivid, but you should know that the "corpses" are all celebrated figures in the crime literature field.

The pretty brunette stabbed in the chest, she with the ghastly staring eyes, is Carol Brener, the owner of New York's famous mystery bookshop, *Murder, Inc.* The lady sprawling with blood streaming from her mouth is Dilys Winn, the Edgar-winning author of *Murder, Inc.* (the book)

and *Murderess, Inc.*, soon to appear. Ruthless violence has also been done to celebrated crime artist Edward Gorey (was ever a man better named?) Otto Penzler, the head of *The Mysterious Press* and co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*, Michele Slung, the compiler of *Crime on Her Mind*, and Harper and Row's famous mystery editor, Joan Kahn.

The last two richly deserve their depicted fate, Michele for failing to send me a copy of her book (as promised) and Miss Kahn for once turning down a book of mine that subsequently (gloat!) did quite well as a Readers Digest selection in fifteen languages. Seriously, get these tour de force reprints while you still can. If your bookstore can't supply them, try *Murder, Inc.* or *The Scene of the Crime*, 13636 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, California.

☆ ☆ ☆

At the latest Edgar Awards Dinner in New York Aaron Marc Stein received the highest of all awards given by the Mystery Writers of America — the Grand Master. The author of more than 100 books, under his own name and as both Hampton Stone and George Bagby, he is a smooth professional who is always reliable. In

The Rolling Heads we again meet his well known Matt Erridge, an engineer with some interesting side activities. However, this time the capable Mr. Erridge does not solve the crime: that honor is reserved for a resourceful and highly dependable dog named Mathilda who certainly deserves an encore. When this notable canine detective is spotted on the beach in France, someone murmurs "La Grande Mathilda." The description fits. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

★ ★ ★

Anthony Price is a British author who has won both the Silver and Gold Dagger awards, a most impressive achievement. In *Tomorrow's Ghost* he attempts to write a highly involved espionage novel as seen through the eyes of a female operative. Only once to our knowledge has a man written with total insight into a woman's psyche: Christopher Morley in *Kitty Foyle*. Mr. Prince gives it a good try; but his lady takes umbrage at the slightest reference to her femininity, which is regretable. In weaving the complexities of his plot he is at times so introspective it is difficult to determine precisely what is going on. This is particularly true at the finish where the reader is left up in the air, the identity of the villain still uncertain. In this case the mirror is a shade too dark. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)

★ ★ ★

A much brisker work, and a captivating one, is Sarah Kemp's *Over the Edge*. This author, who is new to us, definitely knows what she is about.

She throws the switch on the reader time after time, but always with logic and realism. A missing three-year-old girl is a possible murder victim, one of the strong taboos in mystery literature. Miss Kemp handles this difficult theme with mastery and her solution is not only totally unexpected, but beautifully realized. This is not a great book in the genre, but it is a highly engaging and interesting one. Encore, Miss Kemp, if you please! (Doubleday Crime Club \$7.95)

★ ★ ★

One of the steady professionals in the field of crime fiction is Arthur Maling who writes briskly about the investment firm of Price, Potter, and Petacque, most particularly Brock Potter who conducts frequent field investigations on behalf of the firm's clients. Three of his best titles have just been reprinted by Harper and Row's Perennial Library at \$1.95 each in soft cover. The books are *Schroeder's Game*, *Ripoff*, and *Lucky Devil*. If you have been missing Maling up to now, here's your chance to correct the omission at low cost. He always keeps things moving, he writes very well indeed, and he'll have you hooked within the first few pages. In person Maling is a quiet and engaging gentleman who never suggests that he has it in him to create such excitement. You can take it from us that he does. Incidentally, all three titles first appeared as Harper Novels of Suspense in hard cover and may still be found in that format if you prefer.

★ ★ ★

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers was a lady

of notable gifts. She was a scholar of distinction capable of translating Dante's *Inferno* from medieval Italian into highly literate English. She wrote some distinguished pamphlets on religious themes. Also, as the world well knows, she created detective literature that has held its place in popularity for decades. A recent biography of her by Ralph E. Home gives an accurate portrait of this multifaceted personality who created religious dramas, radio plays, and Lord Peter Wimsey.

Now the same publisher, the Kent State University Press, has given us *As Her Wimsey Took Her*, a series of critical essays on her works, edited by Margaret P. Hannay. This volume contains fifteen essays, and a valuable bibliography of Miss Sayer's manuscripts and letters in public collections in the United States.

The point is well made that up until circa 1970 Miss Sayers was almost exclusively known as the author of the Lord Peter Wimsey stories; her work as a dramatist, philosopher of aesthetics, and translator was in near total eclipse. Within the present decade her less celebrated works, notably *The Mind of the Maker*, which has been called both one of the most incisive statements of the Christian aesthetic and Sayers' greatest achievement, have been finding a greatly widened audience. Dr. Hannay and the other contributors who appear with her in this volume provide a composite of a truly remarkable mind and a personality who made a permanent impression on literature. For the serious student of the field of the detective story, this is an indispensable volume. (Kent State University Press, \$15.00) ☀

Don't Miss
THE TWO-STAR CORPSE
a New Major Lansing Novelet
by W.L. Fieldhouse

in the next MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MIKE'S MAIL



Got something you'd like to tell Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, other readers? We'd like to hear from you. Brickbats are just as welcome as bouquets, though of course we'd rather have bouquets. If we're doing something you don't like, let us know. Maybe we'll change. (And maybe we won't!) Any suggestions for improvement? Any new columns you'd like? Anything you'd like taken out? After all, we put out this magazine for your entertainment, and we want to make sure you're getting your money's worth. Write!

CEF

FIELDHOUSE FANS

I just finished reading *A Drink Before Dying* by William L. Fieldhouse, and it was terrific! It is such a pleasure to read such fine novelets in your wonderful magazine. Please continue to publish more stories about Major Lansing. Your magazine will always be at the top of my list, as long as you are publishing works of such fine authors. Thanks for listening, and keep up the good work!

James M. Peters

I very much enjoyed reading *The Tattered Corpse* by W.L. Fieldhouse in the August issue of MIKE SHAYNE. I would like to read more in that same line. That was the first issue I've ever read. Am looking forward to the next issue. In your upcoming authors section I also noted that W.L. Fieldhouse is upcoming.

J.H. Rothbart

I have the feeling, J.H. that I've misspelled your last name. Your

handwriting is four times better than mine, but the signature sort of trailed off into some other dimension. Sorry about that. But I'm not sorry that you and James Peters enjoy the Major Lansing stories. I think he's an interesting character put in interesting situations, and Fieldhouse's writing style is dynamic enough to really do a good job on it. You'll be thrilled to know that we have several stories of the CID in inventory and will be putting them in the magazine regularly.

STIFF COMPETITION

Received the July issue of MIKE SHAYNE this week, and would like to thank you for the new stronger mailing wrapper; arrived here as if it had come straight from the printers, and even without the dog-earing that suggests it might have been read by half the Post Office Staff.

Also, thanks for the contents: I see you've been luring some of the more established authors within, and an excellent review column; you're soon going to be Stiff Competition for EQMM.

Roger Waddington

Nice to hear from our friends in England, Roger. The thing about the BIG NAME authors is good for them and bad for us. They can make more money doing books (and television and movies) than

MAIL

short stories, at least in the mystery field. I suppose we are in competition with EQMM and its companion AHMM, but MSMM has a different personality, and I think there's plenty of room for all of us. However, if you have to make a choice when you're at the newsstands [you are getting very sleepy] and the three magazines are there [your eyelids are getting heavier and heavier] and you just can't make up your mind [you are in a deep trance and must obey my commands] then merely pick the one that appeals to you most. [Buy MIKE SHAYNE! Buy MIKE SHAYNE! Buy MIKE SHAYNE!]

WEIRDOS

In reply to your request for a little feedback from your readers, I decided to do what I have been telling myself to do for a long time and write. As a starter, I really like your magazine and look forward to it anxiously every month. Reading it is my favorite form of relaxation in the evenings. I appreciate the fact that you just turn out a story that I class as "weirdos" once in a while and not as a steady diet; therefore, I even enjoy them. Some of the other mystery magazines to which I subscribe overdo this type of story. Of course, that may be the type that a lot of people enjoy. I will be 50 on my next birthday and am an office worker 40 hours a week and a

housewife all the other hours. It's very possible that a person's age bracket determines the type of reading he or she enjoys. The police detective who solves the crime even though he may be a little callous and not surprised by much is a particular favorite of mine.

Bonnie Ferguson

Most of our stories are and will continue to be in the conventional mode, though I wouldn't want them to become dull and predictable; stories should have suspense and surprises. But I expect we'll also have from time to time the off-beat yarns just to raise an eyebrow, evoke a shudder, bring a smile.

I think that a person's age is just one factor, Bonnie, in determining the type of reading a person enjoys, and probably not the most important one either. I enjoy the 1930's Mickey Mouse, but I also read Will Durant — and a lot of things in between. And Happy Birthday!

HE LOVES LUCY

For well over twenty years I have been a Mike Shayne fan. The stories are interesting but clean enough to pass around to friends at work. Finally Lucy is back in the action. For awhile she would only be mentioned in a line of two per story. Fans know she does much more per plot than just give M.S. a phone message.

Some of the covers portray Mike

more *cute* than *rugged*. (Only lately one showed a wave in the hair — now really!)

(Remember you asked for reader response.)

Are there any plans to republish early adventures in New Orleans during the Phyllis period? There are a few I can't find. Everyone must hang onto Shayne books.

Keep up the good magazines.

E. O'Donnell

You're right, Lucy is such an integral part of Mike Shayne's life she should certainly figure more in the stories, but of course she can't be with him most of the time when he's out private detecting. Besides, we've got to give some time to those other gorgeous ladies and see what luck they have with our hero.

And you're right again (that's twice in a row!) about the Shayne visual image, which tried for awhile to make him seem more youthful. I think we're succeeding, however, in getting him back to the old Mike Shayne we know and love.

As far as early adventures, there are currently no plans afoot here to republish them (we've been giving you brand new stories all down the line, with Shayne lead novels and the others), but I'd like to hear from other readers on this.

SOFT-BOILED

Your editorial in the latest issue inspired me to write — I don't

believe in being passive!

I'll be honest — I've only bought one MSMM, new, in my life. I have bought a few used ones, at flea markets, for ten or fifteen cents. But I *have* been buying The Other mystery mags since I was fourteen or so (I'm 29 now). So why have I been boycotting Mike Shayne?

The answer is simple — I don't much care for hard-boiled stories about capers or heists; I don't like characters named Big Mike or Frenchy or Roxy. I know you have to make the magazine appeal to the folks who don't care for the slightly intellectual aura that *Ellery Queen's* has; people only have so much money to spend on magazines. I myself prefer soft-boiled to hard. Life is hard-boiled enough — when I read, I want a little escape from it. Also, living in

the town where Sing Sing makes it's home (and my wife is from Attica, oddly enough) I find the common criminal neither fascinating nor romantic, and I certainly don't want to read about him, even if he gets caught in the end, unless the plot or the writing of the story are exceptional, e.g. Chandler or Hammett.

Fred Harold Tolman

It's a shame we can't get new stories from Chandler and Hammett, but some of the writers we use write very well indeed. If you think we run just stories of capers and heists, you're been missing some excellent non-caper and non-heist stories. By the way, Big Mike, Frenchy, and Roxy send their regards and have promised to look you up when they get in town. •

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The Maltese Falcon



HUMPHREY BOGART



MARY ASTOR



PETER LORRE



SIDNEY GREENSTREET

QUIZ

- The 1941 MOVIE -

THE MALTESE FALCON, starring Humphrey Bogart as detective Sam Spade, is a classic in the mystery genre. If you haven't seen it, stop reading right now and go find a theater where it's playing; it's thirty-eight years old and still going strong at select movie houses (and sometimes on television). If you *have* seen it (and that'll include most of you), see how many of these questions you can get right. Answers are upside down at the end of the quiz.

1. This 1941 version was:
(a) the first (b) the second (c) the third (d) the fourth filming of the Dashiell Hammett novel.
2. The film was directed by:
(a) James Whale (b) George Marshall (c) John Huston
(d) Busby Berkeley
3. Sam Spade's partner in the detective business was:
(a) Miles Banyon (b) Miles Archer (c) Lew Archer
(d) Lew Ayres
4. The city out of which Sam Spade operated was:
(a) New York (b) Chicago (c) Miami (d) San Francisco
5. Screenplay was by:
(a) Dashiell Hammett (b) Basil Dickey (c) John Huston
(d) Mario Puzo
6. The ship carrying the black bird from Hong Kong was named:
(a) La Paloma (b) La Pomona (c) La Golondrina
(d) La Cucharacha

7. The murderer of Sam's partner was:
 (a) Joel Cairo (b) Kasper Gutman (c) Brigid O'Shaugnessy
 (d) Wilmer Cook
8. Who was Sam Spade's secretary?
 (a) Della Street (b) Effie Perine (c) Lucy Hamilton
 (d) Nikki Porter
9. According to Kasper Gutman, the minimum worth of The Maltese Falcon was:
 (a) 250 thousand dollars (b) five hundred thousand dollars
 (c) one million dollars (d) five million dollars
10. Match the characters with the actors who portrayed them.
- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Kasper Gutman | A. Barton MacLane |
| 2. Joel Cairo | B. Ward Bond |
| 3. Wilmer Cook | C. Peter Lorre |
| 4. Lt. Dundy | D. Elisha Cook, Jr. |
| 5. Captain Jacoby | E. Sidney Greenstreet |
| 6. Detective Tom Polhaus | F. Walter Huston |

ANSWERS:

6-B
 5-F
 4-A
 3-D
 2-C
 1-E
 10-

1-c 2-c 3-b 4-d 5-c 6-a 7-c 8-b 9-c

SCORING:

Okay, give yourself twenty-five points just for having the good taste to be a MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE reader. Add five points for each correct answer. If you score 90 to 100, go to the head of the class and consider yourself a superior human being. 80 to 90 should give you a warm feeling that you're certainly above average. 75 is passing and that's still okay. But anything below that means you haven't been paying attention — but as long as you're having fun, who cares? If you didn't take the test at all but peeked at the answers, we still love you. And why not? As Bogie/Sam Spade said of the black bird at the end of the film, "It's the stuff dreams are made of!"

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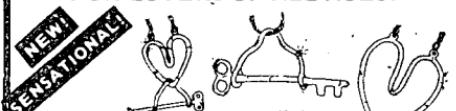
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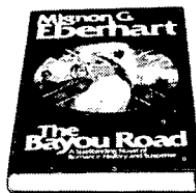
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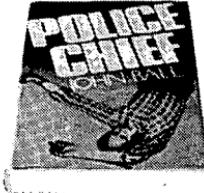
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